

The Meat Issue

OUTDOOR LIFE

DECEMBER 2015–JANUARY 2016

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*Skinning an
elk carcass at
Yellowstone
Processing (p. 57).*

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BY BRAD FITZPATRICK

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The best way to step up your butchering game is to spend a weekend with one of the busiest wild-game processors in the West. That's exactly what we did.

BY PJ DELHOMME

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MEAT MANIFESTO

Collecting and sharing wild meat is much more than a pastime. It's an essential ingredient in what makes us human.

BY SHANE MAHONEY

PLUS: A year of meat, quantified.



COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY
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LIFE

THE

WAYPOINT

Chamberlain, SD / December 15 / 1:01 p.m.

Despite feeling under the weather after a rowdy night, Brian Grossenbacher and his buddies rallied for pheasant hunting. But the freezing rain and snow didn't help. "We almost put the Suburban in the ditch three times," he says of the icy drive to the field. "It was one of those days where we thought, *Why didn't we stay in bed?*" Luckily for them, and Willie the Lab, the birds were holding in the snow, which made for an incredible hunt. Grossenbacher remembers his first hunt with Willie, when the stalwart Lab was just a pup chewing on spent shotgun shells. "He's come a long way. He's as tough a dog as there is."





SPEAK UP!

► Really? So it costs \$1,400 to mount a shotgun suppressor that resembles a car muffler, plus another \$200 for a tax stamp? ["Shushing Your Shotgun," Shooting, October 2015] I wonder how that configuration fits in a gun case. Color me baffled. Don't they sell ear plugs and earmuffs in your neck of the marsh? We "skinflints" know dumb tech when we see it.

*Dr. T. C. Jennings
Sanford, MI*

SHOOTING EDITOR JOHN B. SNOW REPLIES:

► I know plenty of skinflints who hunt, and most of them cup their ears when you call their name (aka the NRA salute) and shout, "Huh?"

SLIP UP

► I just want to make sure that someone does not try to use a slip cork as described in "Popping the Cork" [Fishing, October 2015]. It will not work.

The moveable slip knot must be put on the line first, followed by the bead (if one is used). Then the line can be run through the center of the free-sliding float, and the weight and hook attached.

*Wayne J. Akey
Kronenwetter WI*

SHARP OBSERVATIONS

► I thoroughly enjoyed reading your broadhead test ["The Broadhead Test," August 2015], and so did all my buddies. Your article has come up time and time again in recent conversation. Thanks for sharing.

*David Marvin
Newberg, OR*

FROM THE WEB: TOP DOGS [OCTOBER 2015]

► For anyone who has ever loved a dog. Five great stories.

—Bill Baldwin, via Facebook

► The Lab, Ace, who was featured in this story, was my dad's dog. Ace passed shortly after the article was written. He will be greatly missed.

—Patrick Pitt, via Facebook

► My dog might not be a "top dog," but she's mine, and that's what matters!

—Steven Spoon, via Facebook

GUN TEST: BROWNING BLR TAKEDOWN [SEPTEMBER 2015]

► The BLR is the classic of classics. Why on earth would anyone want to put tactical equipment on this? Slap a nice walnut stock on it, strip those sissy rails off, and bore that barrel for a large game load. Can't at least one classic be kept out of the tactical nightmare?

—Chad Wilson, via Facebook

► Kudos to Browning for keeping up with the times. Yes, I abhor anything black,

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plasticky, and so tactical that you might cut yourself on the Picatinny rail, but let's get real. It's 2015. Tactical sells today. Browning is in the business of selling guns. If this keeps them abreast of their competition, I'm all for it.

By the way, I have a BLR-81 with a Grade III stock that's got a beautiful figure. I would never part with it.

—Ben Enjerry, via Facebook

CORRECTIONS

► The photographs of the drags in "What a Drag" [Hunting, October 2015] were incorrectly labeled. "The Love Lure" actually describes the swatch of deer hide, and "The Blackstrap" describes the molasses-soaked sock.

► To clarify, Black Duck Outfitters does not operate duck hunts on public-water lands ["Teal Terroir," Hunting, September 2015]. This is illegal in the state of Maryland.

DEER OF THE YEAR

► We're not sure what's better: The hunt for your buck, or getting to tell the story afterward. The good news is, you can do both.



TELL YOUR STORY

► When we reached out to our contributors to ask about their first memories of the return of white-tail deer to North America ["The Comeback," November 2015], we heard all kinds of tales about hoof-prints, white flags, and first tags.

Now we want to hear your recollections of those bygone days when America's favorite game animals were scarcely more than rumors.

Send an email to myol@outdoorlife.com and tell us about your first memories and hunts. Don't forget to include a photograph.

Our annual "Deer of the Year" feature is made possible by readers like you. So don't forget to share your photos and stories from this season with us, and encourage your family and friends to do the same. If your buck is special to you, we want to know about it. Visit OutdoorLife.com/deeroftheyear to enter or email us at deeroftheyear@outdoorlife.com.

A USER'S GUIDE TO THE ARCHIVES

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Meat in the Pan

HUNTING AS A PREAMBLE TO CONVERTING WILD GAME INTO MEALS

My favorite artist is Charlie Russell, and my favorite of his paintings of frontier Montana shows a sheep hunter peering perplexedly down from the rim of a canyon. Balanced on a rock shelf below is the ram the hunter has just killed with his lever gun. It's clearly going to take some doing to retrieve that bighorn.

The painting's title says what must be on that hunter's mind: "Meat's Not Meat Till It's in the Pan."

That title has become a sort of motto of my hunting seasons, spoken with special emphasis when an animal's recovery is particularly difficult. But it captures the main reason I hunt: to make meat.

Like most of you, I hunt for a lot of other reasons: to be challenged in a way I'm not in the rest of my life; to feel that little tightening of my stomach that I felt when I was 14 years old and anything was possible; and to spend time outside with people I love. But mainly, I hunt to feed my family. With only a few exceptions, the meat we eat is from wild game, so an unfilled tag is an empty plate.

Something profound happens the moment an animal goes down and the hunt is over. People who don't hunt will never recognize the transition, but it's the beginning of an entirely different, but no less satisfying, experience: converting the animal to meals.

I always hesitate before putting my knife to a wild animal. It seems a violation of nature's perfection to slice a hide or hack a haunch. But any remorse is quickly replaced by the honest, enjoyable work of taking an animal apart and dividing



it into quarters, then portions that will become roasts or stews or sausages. When we butcher, my family labels the freezer-paper packages with the cut, date, and species, but also the location of the kill where that animal was converted to meat.

The theme of this issue is all about that conversion.

Brad Fitzpatrick tells us where to find great quantities of wild meat, and not in the places you might expect (p. 46). P.J. DelHomme reports from behind a skinning knife at one of the busiest game processors in Montana (p. 57). Shane Mahoney argues for an elevated appreciation for the societal and ecological value of wild meat (p. 72). And Jess Field discusses a different transition of animal to meat: from roadkill to ragout (p. 52).

I expect each of these pieces charts your own transition from hunter to provider. Because meat, as almost every hunter knows, isn't meat until it's in the pan.

Andrew McKean

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THE FOOL'S ERRAND

A GANG OF COLLEGE KIDS GET HIGH ON AFRICA BY KEVIN "DOCTARI" ROBERTSON

Out in Africa, contracting the condition known as "bush happiness" is always a dangerous possibility. Reveling in the continent's wild and remote places for a month or so quickly leads to this affliction, which makes a person do incredibly stupid things.

Four of us college students were camped in a grove of giant camelthorn trees in a remote area of northern Botswana. It was spartan, but our camp still had basic comforts—all carted there by a knackered old Land Rover.

The full moon shone so brightly we had no need for a lantern, and it was too hot for a campfire.

To the detriment of our studies, we had been in that environment long enough to become bush happy. I recognized this instantly when Simon suddenly asked, "How much will you each pay me to cut a hair off that elephant's tail?"

Now, camelthorn seedpods, which resemble the human ear, are to elephants what M&M's are to kids. The trees we were camped under were heavy with pods, and they had attracted the attention of a massive old bull elephant. With the pace of an arthritic octogenarian, the old fellow visited each tree in turn. He would head-butt the trunk violently, then leisurely collect the bounty, popping pods into his mouth like a beer drinker would peanuts at a bar.

The promise of a pathetically small amount of cash galvanized Simple Simon (as he was soon to become known) into action. From the toolbox, he removed a pair of side cutters and advanced. The sand was soft and deep, and Simon approached the elephant's rear end in total silence.

Unfortunately, he failed to realize that the tail of a contented elephant never stops wagging. And when he's popping pods into his mouth, a bull elephant is always content. This continual swishing made it impossible for S.S. to collect the evidence he needed. In desperation, he grabbed the tip of the moving appendage.

This the massive pachyderm did not appreciate, and he swung round with the swiftness of a champion quarter horse.

In those long ago days, S.S. was a fine athlete. Despite the sand, his sprint back to the relative safety of our camp was impressive. But the bull spotted S.S.'s rapidly retreating form in the moonlight. Trumpeting, he lowered his head and gave chase—with equally impressive speed.

In horror we watched S.S. running straight toward us, with the huge bull behind him quickly closing the distance. Like a cluster bomb exploding, we scattered. In desperation, just moments before the bull caught him, S.S. dived under the old SUV—not unlike a ground squirrel seeking the sanctuary of its burrow when a hawk flies overhead. Chairs went flying as the angry old bull trashed our camp, searching for the cowering S.S. Had the Land Rover been overturned in the process, I'm sure our bones would still be baking in the Kalahari. Luckily it remained on all four wheels. After a few yearlong seconds, the old bull gave up and ambled off.

We all thought the incident hilarious. Simple Simon did not. For the next few days he was white as a sheet, and his bush happiness was cured—for a bit.

THE DREAM CHASER

FLYFISHING FANATIC CAMERON CHAMBERS SPENT SIX MONTHS PURSUING TROUT IN PATAGONIA. HIS JOURNALS FROM THAT FIRST TRIP A DECADE AGO WERE RECENTLY PUBLISHED, AND HE KEEPS GOING BACK FOR MORE **BY NATALIE KREBS**



Chambers shows off a fat Patagonia brown trout.

OL: How did a kid from Montana end up in southern South America?

Cameron Chambers: I was a seasonal smoke jumper for the U.S. Forest Service, and always got laid off in October. So I started tackling my bucket list. I wanted to guide anglers, but that's not feasible at this time of year in North America. So I persuaded a guy in Chile to hire me. It was kind of a terrible experience, but it got me to Patagonia. I knew I had to go back on my own terms. I took a year to plan, secured a car and a boat, and went wherever I wanted, whenever I wanted, for six months.

OL: Your book is called *Chasing Rumor*. What's the big rumor?

C.C.: The Argentine government started a hatchery program in the early 1900s, which it later abandoned due to financial issues. The existing fish were left to their own devices, and trout thrived. When anglers

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began targeting them 50 years later, rumors of 20-pound trout started to surface.

OL: How did the trip meet expectations?

CC: I'd heard Patagonia was like Montana was 50 years ago, and to a great extent, that's true. The lifestyle of small-scale farming, ranching, unpopulated country... it was an untouched fishing landscape. The fishing itself often didn't live up to the hype. The reality is that fishing there is like fishing everywhere. It's subject to wind, floods, and low, warm water. There was a big learning curve. Once I discovered where to fish and when, it was rewarding.

OL: Tell us more about that learning curve.

CC: It drove me crazy how hard it was to get good info about the rivers. There's no how-to book for every one, like in the U.S. There's no fly shop website where you can check the hot flies. But eventually you figure it out. And that's infinitely more satisfying than having things spoon-fed. I wouldn't have appreciated a fish at home as much as I did after a two-week dry spell in Patagonia.

OL: Speaking of flies, what worked best?

CC: As a flyfishing geek, I had way more flies and gear than I needed. If you only fish a black or olive Woolly Bugger, you'll do just fine. I didn't really find a pattern of their local crayfish, called pancora. The trout love it, so I've been continually inventing a new and better pancora pattern and testing it whenever I return, which is about once a year.

OL: Describe a day in Patagonia.

CC: It's a total shotgun pattern of a daily routine. Lots of driving—it's huge country. I tried to fish all the semi-major river systems, camped a lot, and stayed in hostels. It was sometimes difficult to find fresh food, or a gas station before the next empty tank.

OL: You were flying solo, but made friends.

Who was the most colorful person you met?



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CC: Richard Ameijeiras. I read that he was the most famous fishing guide there. I tried to find him, but my Spanish was terrible. I finally reached his house, but nobody was home. So I gave up. The next day I was driving a few hours south of there. A car drove up behind me, flashing its lights. Eventually I pulled over and a guy got out, yelling in Spanish. The cooler on top of my Pathfinder was open, and everything was blowing away. We introduced ourselves, and it turns out the guy is Richard Ameijeiras. We ended up fishing together, and he became my mentor.

OL: Did you ever catch that 20-pounder?

CC: No, I never caught a 20-pound trout. The largest was probably 12 pounds, a brown trout. Which is still an enormous fish, thank you.

Read the full Q&A at outdoorlife.com/rumor

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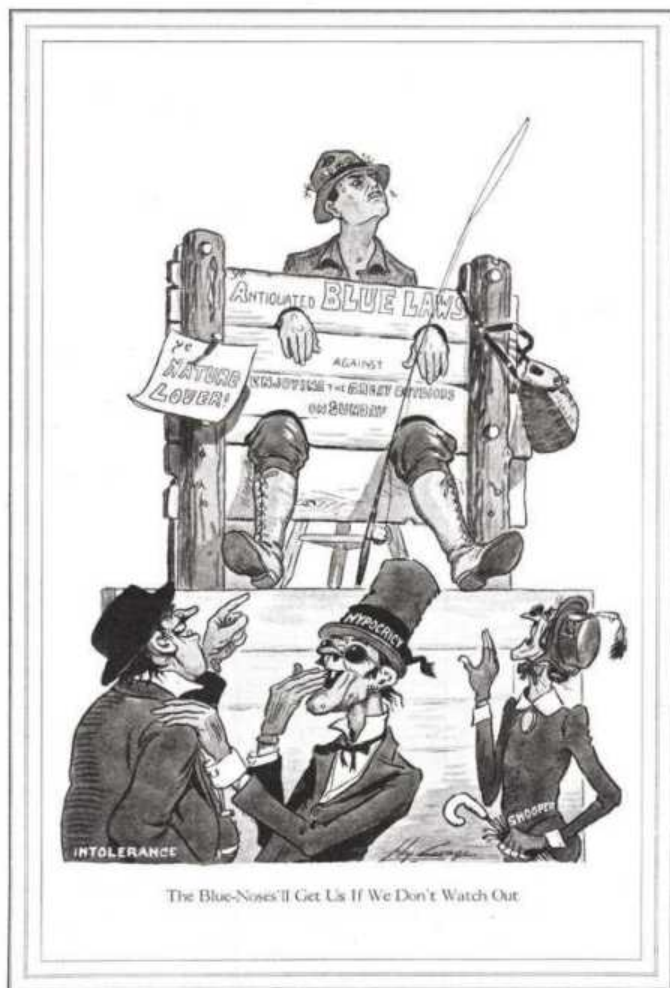
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YE OLDE GAME LAWS

SPORTSMEN HAVE ARGUED ABOUT HUNTING AND FISHING LEGISLATION FOR AS LONG AS RULES HAVE BEEN AROUND. WE LOOK AT SOME OF THE STRANGEST LAWS ON THE BOOKS, AND HOW THEY COMPARE TO MODERN REGS **BY NATALIE KREBS**



SUNDAY BLUE LAWS / AUGUST 1929

This editorial cartoon accompanied a hilariously scathing editorial by Harry McGuire, OL's then secretary. It was sparked by a news article about a 17-year-old Pennsylvania boy who was sentenced to 25 days in jail for fishing on a Sunday. "I hadn't even had a bite yet," the lad lamented as he was led away to jail.

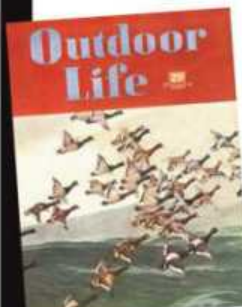
"Most sportsmen are individualists," writes McGuire. "If they didn't love freedom—if they weren't more than ordinarily independent and fair-minded—they wouldn't be American sportsmen... Do they think the commandment 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy' means healthy, clean recreations like hunting and fishing are outlawed by God, in order to make Sunday safe for tea-drinking gossips and their holier-than-thou pleasures? By what law of reason is it right and just in the eyes of God and the commonwealth that fishing should be any more wrong on Sunday than walking, or eating cake, or riding in automobiles?"

Unbelievably, there are still a few states that hold on to Sunday hunting laws. We thought these regulations were outrageous in 1929, and 86 years later, 11 states still impose restrictions—if not outright bans—on Sunday hunting, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.



MEAT POSSESSION / DECEMBER 1945

"Filling the freezer" is the meat-making mantra hammered into hunters' heads these days. But prior to the introduction of the home freezer, most states outlawed the possession of wild game starting a certain number of days after the season ended, to help thwart out-of-season poaching. As the home freezer was popularized, many states were slow to update regulations. OL tallied those that lagged behind, calling on readers "to demand sensible revision of game-possession laws wherever they...have outlived their usefulness." In 1945, only 12 states had no time limit on game-meat possession. All other states imposed limits that ranged from zero days after the season's close (eight states) to opening day of the following season (one state at the time; some follow this law today).



BAG LIMITS / JUNE 1924

"OL has ever preached the gospel of safe and sane conservation," reads an editorial from 1924. "'Conserve' is a better word than 'prohibit.' We shall continue to advocate that the federal bag should be placed at 15 per day, with a limit of, say, 90 ducks per week."

At the time, it was legal to take 25 ducks per day if state limits weren't in place. The editorial breaks down the math: A daily limit of 25 ducks worked out to 2,675 birds that could theoretically be killed each season by one hunter. This was already curtailed from previous daily limits of 100, then 75, then 50 ducks. OL crusaded for lower limits for a decade, until the 15-bird limit was approved.

TO READ MORE ABOUT THESE ANTIQUATED LAWS, CHECK OUT A FREE TRIAL OF OUR DIGITAL ARCHIVES AT C2C.OUTDOORLIFE.COM

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Photo Credit: Kevin Lynch



Bristol-Myers Squibb



Stand Up To Cancer is a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation (EIF), a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

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HUNTING

WILD TURKEYS

FROSTED FLOCKS

Who says you can't call in gobblers in the wintertime? During the long, liberal winter season in the Plains states, hunters with a variety of simple calls can take multiple gobblers in a single calling session. It helps to also have a high tolerance for cold. **BY ROB KECK**



TIP

Winter gobbler groups will often respond to large decoy spreads. Stake out a half dozen jake decoys and then call sparingly.

Gobblers pick at food as they soak up the morning sun on the sheltered side of a windbreak.

TES RANDLE JOLLY

The otherwise peaceful winter morning was disrupted by two dozen strutters and subordinate toms aggressively gobbling, challenge-purring, and posturing as they made their way to my tail fan. I tried to sort out the best beards in this approaching wave, but it didn't matter. These were all adult gobblers, and at least 50 more longbeards were coming behind the first gang. The legal limit was four. If they separated, I might have the chance to fill all my tags in this single crazy calling session.



This is my favorite of all turkey hunts—the winter season in Kansas. A hunter will see more turkeys, hear more turkeys, and potentially call in more gobblers now than during any other season of the year. This is true not only in Kansas, but also in its neighboring states, including Nebraska and South Dakota.

Virginia and other states east of the Mississippi reopen their turkey season in January, providing hunters with winter opportunities as well, but wintering flocks of Easterns are generally not as large as those of Rios found across the open plains.

Adding to the appeal of a Sunflower State hunt are limits that are double those of the spring season. Plus, the season extends to the end of January, which means you can combine turkey hunting with some fantastic waterfowling.

THE UNDISCOVERED APPEAL OF WINTER HUNTING

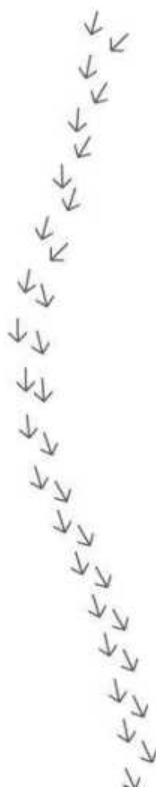
Hunters who pursue turkeys in late December or in January often get access to private lands that are closed to deer hunters during the gun season. There is virtually nobody turkey hunting in January. That may be because of the sometimes brutal cold and snowy weather, or it may simply be because hunters have yet to discover this opportunity.

The sight of hundreds of wild turkeys in their winter flocks is something to behold, and the turkey vocalizations can be intense and almost deafening when you're close to the roost. The birds generally segregate according to sex, and they will be bunched together when they're at a common food source. I've seen gobbler groups that exceeded a hundred.

These birds are often a mix of Rios, Easterns, and Merriams, or hybrids of all three. In the open country of Kansas, Nebraska, and South Dakota, the birds are very visible, providing the hunter with the opportunity to develop his strategy.

My approach is simple: Get as close to that gobbler group as possible and then set up undetected, generally in the edge of timber, along a brushy fence line, or in other cover. Then I place my tail fan or a Montana Decoy strutter between my calling position and the turkeys. Once I return to cover, I begin gobbling on a tube, and I

Tracks point the way to a big group of turkeys in Indiana.



throw in challenge-purring and gobbler clucking on a double slate and mouth yelper. I try to make as much commotion as possible, which includes using a dried turkey wing or my cap to flog the ground or my pant leg. This simulates the almost constant fighting and reestablishment of the pecking order that goes on within a gobbler group from the time they fly down from the roost in the morning until they fly up in the afternoon.

I watched that flock of Kansas gobblers approach my setup, and then I watched the toms flogging and spurring my tail fan, I had to wait carefully until a single longbeard peeled off to the side of the melee. I needed to keep my 20-gauge load of tungsten-alloy 7s from taking out multiple birds. Even with four tags in my pocket, I didn't want to end the hunt on the first morning.



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BARGAIN BLADES

CAN YOU BUY A SOLID HUNTING KNIFE FOR LESS THAN \$50? OH, YEAH. BUT BEWARE OVERBUILT, UNDERPERFORMING DOGS **BY ANDREW MCKEAN**

My favorite everyday carry knife is a Ka-Bar Lightweight Folder. And any job that lock-back, drop-point folder can't handle, my replaceable-blade Havalon Piranta can. Both are constant companions in my pocket or my hunting pack. Both cost under \$50. Which made me wonder: What other hardworking knives can be had for a song? Turns out, there are plenty of options. But just as the world of affordable hunting blades is full of great deals, it's also littered with junk.

I spent a season with the crop of knives you see here, field dressing, skinning, and butchering deer and game birds. This roster is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather representative of the sort of blades available at this price point.

W.R. CASE CAMO CALIBER RIDGEBACK

\$44; wrcase.com

It's a rare knife that retails for under \$50 and is made in America, but W.R. Case has delivered a stout, useful drop-point hunter with the classic "Case XX USA" proof mark. The deep-bellied, 4 1/8-inch blade is large enough for big jobs like splitting the pelvis and sternum of a deer, but it's also nimble enough for precision work like skinning and jointing birds.

BEAR & SON BIRD & TROUT

\$45; bearandsoncutlery.com



My favorite of this crowd of knives, this 3-inch clip-point is a hard-wearing caper and meat-trimming marvel. The synthetic Delrin stag handle is easy to grip and adds a nostalgic look to this made-in-America knife. A well-executed rendition of a classic belt knife, the 440-steel blade is configured for precision work, and the oiled leather sheath is first-rate.

BROWNING MODEL 111D

\$39; browning.com



The best thing I can say about this knife is that its lock-back action is super strong. But the 3 1/4-inch blade is also overly heavy and too bulky for a walkabout folder. The Ross Kommer-designed blade, though its metal is Sandvik 12C27, is nothing special. The handle's black G-10 synthetic scales offset the silver of the metalwork nicely. Comes with a nylon sheath.

CAMILLUS TIGERSHARP

\$49; camillusknives.com



Camillus has worked around one of the liabilities of the replaceable-blade systems—which is that the flimsy, flexible blades are prone to breaking—by shrouding the surgical blade in a heavy support sleeve. The replaceable blades are held in place by the thumb screw. Loosen it, pivot the blade up and out of the shroud, and you can trade in a fresh, sharp blade.

CRKT FREE RANGE HUNTER

\$45; crkt.com



Another Kommer-designed blade, this super-light (2 ounces) and super-strong drop-point skinner fit my hand comfortably, and it quickly became my sheath knife of choice for the deer season. Its high-carbon blade held an edge through four deer before needing a touch-up. The knife's nylon sheath comes wrapped in paracord and includes a pocket for a whetstone.

GERBER VITAL FIXED BLADE

 \$43; gerbergear.com


Featuring perhaps the smartest, safest blade-transfer mechanism of any of the newer replaceable-blade systems, the Vital also has a comfortable, non-slip handle and ships with six extra blades (but no sheath). Depress a tab behind the blade to disengage the locking block, push the blade forward, and remove. No more pliers or sliced fingers.

KERSHAW LONEROCK RBK

 \$40; kershaw.kaiusaltd.com


The RBK is a decent alternative to the Havalon. It features scary-sharp surgical blades that can be traded out when they dull. The blade is held in place by a strong, simple mating block, though it requires pliers to remove safely. An additional 15 blades and an extra skeleton "buddy" handle add value to the package.

REMINGTON CUTLERY 3-PIECE BIG-GAME SET

 \$40; remingtonblades.com


This unlovely set promises much more than it delivers—namely, that each of the three knives will handle a different part of the big-game dressing process, from skinning to caping. Unfortunately, the blades are poorly balanced and configured, and the black-oxidized 420 stainless steel dulls easily.

KERSHAW LONEROCK 1895

 \$50; kershaw.kaiusaltd.com


If you're shopping for Kershaw blades online, be aware that the Lonerock name covers all kinds of different models. I tested two: the replaceable-blade RBK (above) and this fixed-blade version. With wonderful balance and a deep-bellied, 3.2-inch nitride-coated blade that can handle gutting, skinning, and butchering chores, this is a quality tool.

RAPALA CLIP-POINT KNIFE

 \$35; rapala.com


Rapala's birch-handled fillet knives have been fixtures at fish camps for 80 years, but the Finnish company that makes them introduced Rapala-branded hunting knives just this year. I caped, quartered, and butchered a Wyoming mule deer with the 4 1/2-inch clip-point model and marveled at its sharpness and ability to retain an edge.

SOG FIELDER XL

 \$35; sogknives.com


Finally, an affordable knife that has organic material in its handle! So many budget blades rely on synthetics for scales that the open-grained wood of this SOG looks almost extravagant. The clip-point, liner-locking blade is a little big for everyday carry, but the 4.13-inch blade made with 7CR17 steel is sized right to take apart game animals.

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TRAIL BLAZERS

OL'S ACCESS PROGRAM RECOGNIZES CHAMPIONS OF OUR PUBLIC LANDS **BY JODI STEMLER AND ANDREW MCKEAN**

Those of us who rely on public land for our hunting, fishing, and other outdoor recreation generally cherish the particular bits of land that we use. Generally, we are such dogged defenders of our own access to those specific places that the larger idea of the public's access to public property gets blurred by our near-sighted focus.

Luckily, there are far-sighted people among us who are looking out not only for our beloved public parcels, but who also speak up for the larger idea of the public's right to access public land. These are legislators, public-policy watchers, business owners, and recreationists who recognize that any erosion of that public-access doctrine anywhere is a threat to the idea of accessible public land everywhere.

Outdoor Life's Open Country awards, presented each year, celebrate these visionaries who have demonstrated their long-term commitment to advocating for public access.

This year's awards will be presented at the SHOT Show in January in Las Vegas. They go to a non-profit that has doggedly defended public access in the courts, to a company that built its business on public-land hunting, to an advocate of accessible shooting ranges, and to the oldest state-agency access program in the nation.



1 NON-PROFIT

PUBLIC LAND/WATER ACCESS ASSOCIATION

► PLWA got its start in the 1970s, litigating to defend angler access to Montana's blue-ribbon trout streams. Its landmark cases led to the state's Stream Access Law in 1985. But the PLWA didn't stop at streams. In 1988, the group successfully sued for public access to state school-trust lands, and members continue to fight road closures. In July, PLWA won a 10-year battle to open a gated road blocking access to the West Deer Creek area of the Custer-Gallatin National Forest, restoring the public's access to 16,000 acres of public lands.

2 CORPORATE

FIRST LITE

► An outdoor clothing company based in Ketchum, Idaho, First Lite has become one of the loudest corporate voices against efforts to sell or transfer public lands. Company founders Kenton Carruth and Scott Robinson and marketing manager Ryan Callahan know that public lands are essential for quality hunting—and their business. "If you have wild places that are relatively untouched, then the game takes care of itself and hunters have great access," says Carruth. "Once the place is gone, so is the game and the hunting. That's what would happen if we gave away federal lands."



Montana-based Public Land/Water Access Association has fought for stream access and to keep roads open to National Forest land.

3 STATE/GOV. AGENCY

PENNSYLVANIA GAME COMMISSION

► The PGC's Hunter Access Program was started in 1936 and is the oldest in the country. It focuses on providing sportsmen with access, mainly near populated areas, because places to hunt with ample game close to home are key to recruiting and retaining hunters. The agency's interactive online map provides information for hunters to find places to go. The 2.6 million acres enrolled in the habitat-focused Hunter Access Program make up more than a third of the accessible land open to hunting in Pennsylvania, says Mike Pruss, PGC's private lands chief.

4 INDIVIDUAL

SUSAN RECCE, NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

► Recce began her career with the NRA 40 years ago, but her tenure was interrupted by stints at the Department of the Interior. She now leads the NRA's efforts on hunting, conservation, and wildlife resource issues, including affirming hunting access to national wildlife refuges and increasing funding for shooting ranges. As the long-term chair of the Public Lands Hunting, Fishing, and Shooting Sports Roundtable, Recce works to ensure access for hunting and shooting on public lands and advocates for sportsmen.

TENDING TRAILS IN CALIFORNIA AND PENNSYLVANIA



Open Country was never intended to remain only on the pages of this magazine. Because the program is all about creating, retaining, and enhancing public access to public land, we helped sponsor a pair of access festivals on both sides of the nation last summer.

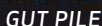
The first, held in conjunction with the Indian Creek Valley ATV Club in southwestern Pennsylvania, focused on building new ATV trails on a network of private lands leased for off-road riding.

The second festival was held on National Public Lands Day on California's San Bernardino National Forest and involved nearly 60 volunteers who

helped restore the Cactus Flat off-highway vehicle area, one of Southern California's most popular ATV riding areas. The San Bernardino National Forest is the second-most-visited public property in the nation.

Volunteers helped plant native shrubs and trees, collected seeds from native plants to be used for restoration work on the site and elsewhere, and restored trails that had been damaged by erosion. The work was co-sponsored by Southern California Mountains Foundation, REI, the U.S. Forest Service, and by Open Country sponsor Yamaha Motor Corp. USA.

—Andrew McKean



FOUR STRATEGIES THAT WILL HELP YOU CONSISTENTLY FIND AND KILL
PREDATORS ON BIG PIECES OF PUBLIC LAND **BY NATALIE KREBS**

"There's no replacement for scouting," says retired Pennsylvania state trooper and predator-calling expert Kirk McKendree, who is sponsored by Red Eyes Ops, Coyote Light, and ICOTec. Your best bet is to use

Once you find an area that is holding coyotes, the trick is to home in on them undetected. It's challenging, and requires the right combination of terrain and wind, but it can be done. Here's how.



2 GUT BUSTER

It can be challenging to coax in coyotes at the end of deer season, when the predators are busy finishing off crippled deer. So keep an eye out for other hunters and the discarded gut piles from their kills. Back off once you've located one, says Johnson. "I don't want to alert coyotes right at a gut pile. I see which direction they're traveling in, and then I try to go 1 to 3 miles away and pick them off there." If you choose to hunt over offal or a winter-kill carcass, you'll likely see the coyotes only at night, and you'll wear out the setup much faster.

3 FROZEN FOOTTRACE

Rivers and streams transform into reliable travel corridors once the temperatures drop. Coyotes will be using these highways, and you should too, says Johnson. Once the water freezes solid, walk out onto the ice, turn into the wind, and keep pushing until you cut fresh tracks. As soon as the prints veer back onto solid ground, get off the ice and find a high bank in thick cover. "Call into the woods with a hand call—two series, then one series—and they should come ripping across the ice or snaking through the timber."

4 OUTSIDE THE BOX

Public-land coyotes will likely be conditioned to human callers. If you're struggling to get one to commit, add a decoy. McKendree prefers non-target animals, but he experiments with coyote decoys once breeding season kicks in. "It can spook them, but sometimes a decoy might be all it takes," McKendree says, especially if other hunters haven't tried them. The same principle applies to calling. "A lot of people are afraid to use new sounds," says McKendree, who might use a jackrabbit or prairie dog cry while hunting in Pennsylvania. "But that non-native sound might be the key."



HUNTING
WATERFOWL



This duck hunter set up in the right place to pass-shoot these crossers.

SKY HIGH

A WATERFOWLER'S LATE-SEASON GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE AND ETHICAL PASS-SHOOTING
BY ANDREW McKEAN

By now, the ducks and geese in your neighborhood have Ph.D.'s in survival. They've figured out bogus decoy spreads and sour calls, suspicious landing zones, and the dangers that accompany Shadow Grass camouflage.

But these educated birds have a chink in their experiential armor: They must fly daily from water to food and back again. And anytime they take wing, they are vulnerable to hunters gunning for them from below.

These are the pass-shooters, those sky-busting knuckle-draggers that decoyers everywhere love to curse the way dry-fly anglers curse bait fishermen. That antipathy is sharpened every time a duck or goose is wounded and not recovered by a gunner who shoots at a bird low enough to pepper it with

BILL BUCKLEY

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pellets but too high to bring it down.

But here's the thing: Pass-shooters who post up at the right spot at the right time, and exercise both their legs and their restraint, can have far better success (with far less equipment and work) than their decoy-planting brethren. Follow these pointers to be a late-season limiter.

- **Hunt the Edges** In order to consistently pass-shoot birds, you have to learn their daily flight patterns and then find precisely the route they use to fly from roosting areas to feed and back again. But that's just a start. The best pass-shooters know where to intercept these birds when they're no higher than the treetops. Consider the property boundaries of no-hunting zones like wildlife refuges and city parks, and the edges of grain fields.
- **Expect to Move** The specific line the birds take changes daily, depending on wind direction or the whimsy of the flock. Be prepared to move up to 100 yards in order to be right under their flight line.
- **Consider Recovery Zones** A bird that you kill stone-dead 50 feet above you will sail at least that far on its descent, so make

sure you set up where you can recover your birds. Bring a dog to run down cripples.

- **Find Cover** Just as decoys use blinds and camouflage, so must sky-busters stay under cover, or risk flaring birds. Tree trunks, fence lines, or even obscuring reeds and grass will keep you hidden.
- **Shoot for the Beak** In order to place most of your pattern in a high-flying bird's vitals, you must be slightly in front of it. Shoot birds as they're flying toward you, not when they're directly overhead or going away.
- **Know Your Limits** This last consideration is the most important. In order to determine the extent of your range, pattern your gun at distance, and fiddle with choke and load combinations until you find one that consistently delivers lethal payloads. The research of Tom Roster, godfather of wingshooting lethality, proves that in order to consistently place at least a couple of pellets in the vital area of a large goose at 60 yards, you must be capable of placing 50 to 55 pellets in a 30-inch circle at that distance. Roster's formula for pass-shooting geese: 1 1/4-ounces of BBB or T shot in an Improved Modified or Full choke.

AN ALL-WEATHER WORKHORSE

No conditions test a shotgun like cold, wet, late-season waterfowling. Oiled actions can seize up, and numb-fingered shooters can short-stroke pumps. This is the season for a simple, no-frills shotgun like the hard-wearing Silver Synthetic over/under from Legacy Sports International. Grippy, rubberized inserts in the forend and pistol grip give you plenty of purchase, and the oversize tang safety is easily operated with cold or gloved fingers. (\$641; legacysports.com)



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FIELD TEST

GEAR



"I think I'll just make it easy on myself and hunt with all of them. That way I don't have to pick just one."

—AUSTIN ZANK

"I thought all of the bows were pretty solid, but some definitely stood out as better performers."

—GAVIN BOOHER

"I would have expected the most expensive bows to shoot the best, but that wasn't always the case."

—NOAH HANSEN

COMPOUNDS

YOUTH BOW TEST

+ KIDS' BOWS RANGE FROM SCALED-DOWN ADULT MODELS TO COMPOUNDS THAT ADJUST WITH SHOOTERS' GROWTH. OUR EVALUATION HELPS YOU PICK THE RIGHT BOW FOR YOUR YOUNG ARCHER **BY TONY HANSEN**



"I like to have a bow that adjusts, because I don't have to learn a new bow every season."

—KLYNE HUGHES

B

Bowhunting is serious business to me, and I've passed that passion on to my son Noah. He's 14 this season, and his draw length (not to mention draw strength) is approaching the level where an adult bow will fit him just fine. However, choosing a hunt-capable rig over the past three years has been anything but simple—his draw length would change throughout the year, or even the hunting season.

Low-poundage options were plentiful. Those that delivered arrows with suitable kinetic energy were less abundant.

So for this test we pitted flagship bows against ultra-adjustable models. For the latter, we went with Mission—one of the first companies to offer the technology—along with newcomer models from companies that haven't been in the ultra-adjustable game for long.

And to round things out, we chose mid-priced options of both limited and ultra-adjustable models.



FLAGSHIP MISSION BALLISTIC

SCORE: 92.5 **PRICE: \$499**

► Whatever formula Mission Archery is using, it's one that young bowhunters love—both Missions in the test were favorites of the panel, and all of the testers shot the Ballistic exceptionally well.

"The handles are great and fit my hand. The bow was really quiet and shot well," said Gavin. "And they look cool!"

The Ballistic features the AVS cam system that is draw-length-specific, ranging from 26 to 30 inches. It's available in peak draw weights ranging from 50 to 70 pounds, has a brace height of 7 inches, and is 30 1/2 inches axle-to-axle.

The Ballistic packs a ton of features and performance into a relatively small price tag (see above).

MISSIONARCHERY.COM



MISSION HYPE DT

SCORE: 89.5 **PRICE: \$399**

► Featuring draw-length adjustability of 19 to 30 inches and 55 pounds of draw-weight adjustability, the Hype DT will grow with a young hunter.

But here's what made this bow stand out: It didn't shoot like the other highly adjustable models we tested.

"It draws and shoots like the flagship bows we've tested," said Noah. "The back wall is a little mushy, but not so bad. It's fast... Dad, can I get this bow?"

The DT stands for Dampening Technology, and a Mathews Harmonic Stabilizer fits into the riser.

While the Hype DT was the second-highest-scoring bow by the kids, it won Editor's Choice for its ability to provide multiple seasons of use at a great price.

MISSIONARCHERY.COM



BASS PRO SHOPS BLACKOUT INTRIGUE

SCORE: 76.5 **PRICE: \$399**

► The Intrigue was, well, intriguing. "I wasn't expecting this bow to be this good," said Noah. "It's not a big name brand [when it comes to bows], but it's a great bow."

The Intrigue isn't "ultra" adjustable, but it does have a high level of adjustability, with a draw-length range of 23 to 30 inches without the use of a bow press. Draw weight adjusts from 20 to 70 pounds.

Weighing just 3.3 pounds and measuring 31 inches in length, it's a compact bow that the kids loved to shoot.

The Intrigue package includes an Apex 3-pin sight, a stabilizer, a peep sight, a Hodge rest, a D-loop, and a wrist sling. That combo makes it one heck of a buy.

BASSPRO.COM



FLAGSHIP MATEWS CHILL SDX

SCORE: 76 **PRICE: \$900**

► The Chill SDX is a short-draw version of the Mathews' Monster Chill X flagship bow. Using an AVS cam system, the SDX is draw-length-specific, with modules starting at 22 inches.

The Chill got points from the test team for its overall look and feel. All the kids thought it was an impressive-looking bow.

"The draw cycle is amazing, but I would have liked more let-off," said Austin.

"It's really comfortable to shoot, but it feels a little too big in my hands and it is noisier than I expected," said Klyne.

The biggest downside is cost. Like the Hoyt Nitrum, this high-end model comes with a high-end price tag of more than double our winning bow's.

MATEWSINC.COM



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FLAGSHIP HOYT NITRUM 30

SCORE: 70.25 PRICE: \$950

► The Nitrum is a top-end bow that's scaled down for kids. At \$950, it also carries a premium price tag.

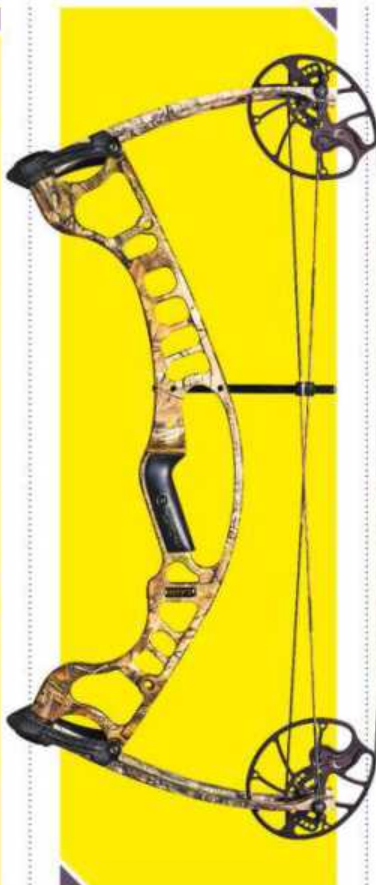
One of Hoyt's flagship offerings, the Nitrum features 2 inches of draw adjustment in its Z5 cam system, with the shortest being 24 inches, and a peak draw weight as low as 40 pounds.

"This bow is very comfortable and the draw is really smooth," said Noah.

But the perceived lack of let-off was something all the testers mentioned.

Performance, as expected, was outstanding. It zipped arrows downrange, and vibration was minimal. Most important, accuracy was consistent across the test panel.

HOYT.COM



HOYT IGNITE

SCORE: 69.5 PRICE: \$299

► The Ignite is Hoyt's foray into the realm of ultra-adjustable bows.

With a draw length of 19 to 30 inches and a weight range of 15 to 70 pounds, the Ignite will provide years of service for a growing kid. But its performance wasn't what the boys were hoping for.

"It seems awkward," said Klyne. "The back wall is really mushy and the bow is loud. I didn't like the draw cycle at all."

On the other hand, both Noah and Austin found the bow to be comfortable, but they also noted that it is loud. The bow also got a mediocre "cool factor" score. The Ignite was the least expensive bow in our test, which parents, at least, might think is cool.

HOYT.COM



FLAGSHIP CABELAS CREDENCE

SCORE: 63.75 PRICE: \$610

► The draw length of the Credence, which was engineered by Bowtech, is adjustable from 26 to 30 inches without a bow press. Draw weight adjusts from 50 to 70 pounds.

The Credence, which is a single-cam bow, received mixed reviews from the test panel on overall feel and shootability.

"It feels good and is very smooth," said Gavin.

"I shot it well, but it didn't feel great to me," said Austin.

The bow comes in a ready-to-shoot kit that includes all accessories, along with arrows and field points.

The Credence is a lightweight, coming in at less than 4 pounds, and it measures 32 inches axle-to-axle.

CABELAS.COM



BEAR CRUZER

SCORE: 61 PRICE: \$399

► Another ultra-adjustable bow, the Cruzler can go from 12 to 30 inches of draw length, thanks to its MV cams. Draw weight ranges from 5 pounds up to 70.

The price is right on this bow, considering it is available in an RTH (Ready to Hunt) package that includes a Trophy Ridge rest, a four-pin sight, a stabilizer, and a quiver.

Unfortunately, the Cruzler's performance didn't live up to the test panel's high expectations.

"I think the bow feels nice, but it has a lot of vibration," said Austin.

Noah added: "I am not a fan at all of the draw cycle. It feels really choppy, almost like I was drawing it in sections."

BEARARCHERY.COM

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YOUTH
BOW TEST
RESULTS

SCORES ARE
AN AVERAGE
FROM THE
FOUR TESTERS

	TESTER'S CHOICE	EDITOR'S CHOICE	GREAT BUY					
								
	MISSION BALLISTIC	MISSION TYPE DT	BASS PRO SHOPS BLACKOUT INTRIGUE	MATHEWS CHILL SDX	HOYT NITRIUM 30	HOYT IGNITE	CABELA'S CREDENCE	BEAR CRUZAR
DRAW CYCLE	10	9	8	7.75	6.75	6.75	7.75	5
SHOOTABILITY	9.5	9	8.75	7.75	8	7	7.5	5.5
FIT AND FINISH	9.25	8.75	6.5	9.5	8.5	7.5	6	5.75
NOISE	9.5	8.75	7	7.5	7	5.25	5	5.5
COOL FACTOR	10	8.75	6.5	8.25	7.75	6.75	5.5	5.5
BALANCE	9	8.75	6.75	7.5	7.75	6	6	5.75
OVERALL FEEL	10	8.75	7.5	8	7.75	7	6.25	5.75
ADJUSTABILITY	6.75	10	9.75	5.75	4.25	9.75	7	9.75
HUNTABILITY	10	8.5	6.75	8.5	7.75	6.25	6.25	6
VALUE	8.5	9.25	9	6.5	4.75	7.25	6.5	6.5
TOTAL SCORE	92.5	89.5	76.5	76	70.25	69.5	63.75	61

HOW WE TEST

We tested eight compound bows, shooting arrows into McKenzie 3D and block-style targets in my southern Michigan backyard. Each bow was set to each individual shooter's draw weight and length.

Testers graded each bow on its draw cycle, shootability, fit and finish, noise, cool factor (aesthetics), balance, overall feel, adjustability, huntability (how appropriate it is for deer hunting), and value. Neither accuracy nor arrow speed was a part of the test, simply because with such a range of draw lengths and weights, it would have been difficult to dial in each bow.

We based the test criteria (except for adjustability) solely on the kids' opinions. Because when it comes down to it, the most important thing for a young shooter is that he enjoys the bow he's shooting.

MEET THE TEST TEAM

OUR YOUNG GUNS HAD VARYING LEVELS OF SHOOTING EXPERIENCE

1. NOAH HANSEN AGE: 14; BIO: Arguably the most experienced bowhunter of the group, Noah started bowhunting whitetails at age 8. He took his first buck last fall. He loves baseball and football; he's a left-handed pitcher and standout linebacker.

2. KLYNE HUGHES AGE: 14; BIO: An all-around outdoorsman, Klyne cut his outdoors teeth chasing coons, squirrels, and rabbits before graduating to whitetails. His best buck, a dandy 10-pointer, fell during last fall's gun season. In the summer months, Klyne is a local legend on the horse-pulling circuit.

3. AUSTIN ZANK AGE: 14; BIO: The least experienced bowhunter of the group, Austin is a terrific all-around athlete who plays baseball, football, and basketball; he also runs track.

4. GAVIN BOOHER AGE: 13; BIO: The youngest of the group, Gavin is an experienced bowhunter with plenty of hours in the woods under his belt.



THE VERDICT

So are ultra-adjustable bows inferior to flagship models with draw-specific cam systems?

Well, it depends. This test showed me that a draw-specific flagship bow isn't automatically better than the ultra-adjustable (which I had assumed would be the case). It really comes down to the model and your shooter.

If your kid grows like a weed, you might consider one of the top adjustable models. On the other hand, if your young hunter is a little older and bigger, the flagships in our test would make a great hunting bow that offers top-level performance. And when your young hunter does outgrow the bow, it can be passed down to the next sibling in line.

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MAKING MEAT

'TIS THE SEASON TO STOCK YOUR LARDER. FROM WINTER COW ELK HUNTS TO HIGH-VOLUME PIGEON SHOTS AND EVEN ROADKILL OPPORTUNITIES, HERE ARE EASY, COST-EFFECTIVE WAYS TO FILL YOUR FREEZER AND FEED YOUR FAMILY

BY BRAD FITZPATRICK

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KYLE FEWELL



While hipsters would like us to believe that they invented the demand for organic, free-range, locally sourced meat, hunters know better. The best source of natural protein doesn't come from a store, and meat doesn't need to be pumped full of antibiotics and hormones to be delicious or affordable. This year, make a resolution to augment your food supply with more venison and wildfowl. You can even go beyond the standard hunter's fare if you dare.

There's a wide range of delicious wild game available for hunter-gatherer types, especially if you're willing to turn to somewhat unconventional sources of protein. That may mean you obtain your dinner by taking down an iguana with a pellet rifle, staking out a grain bin for some feral pigeons, eating what appears to be a giant swamp rat, or maybe even stopping along the road to pick up a freshly killed whitetail doe.

Our ancestors would roll their eyes at our collective unwillingness to use any protein source we find unfamiliar, but we think the following list would make them proud. And hungry.

MAKING MEAT



TREE DRAGONS

➔ **YOU MAY NOT** immediately associate the Florida Keys with high-volume hunting. But if you have a pellet rifle and some space in the freezer, consider taking out a few green and spiny-tailed iguanas in the name of conservation. Despite their creepy cretaceous-period facade, iguanas have a rich white flesh that is considered a delicacy by many.

"Hard freezes in 2010 killed off much of South Florida's invasive iguana population and the populations of many other invasive species," says iguana hunter Terry Gibson of North Swell Media. "But iguanas are back, wrecking gardens, undermining canal banks, and devouring native bird eggs, insects, and plants. There's still time to eat our way out of this situation. Where discharging a firearm or an air rifle is legal, aim for the ear hole with a .22 or high-powered pellet gun. In urban and suburban areas, bait Havahart traps with hibiscus flowers or fruit. Euthanize trapped iguanas in a chest freezer or with a sharp machete. Just remember, though, that those spiny tails swing fast and can hurt you."

According to Gibson, iguanas make excellent table fare. "Treat the meat just like you would frog's legs or a gator tail. It's delicious fried, grilled, or slow-cooked in the oven. The meat takes on the flavor of whatever you choose to marinate it with. Acidic citric sauces and white wine help tenderize the meat. Marinate under ice to keep it cold."

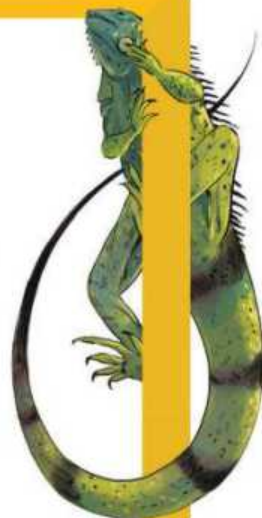
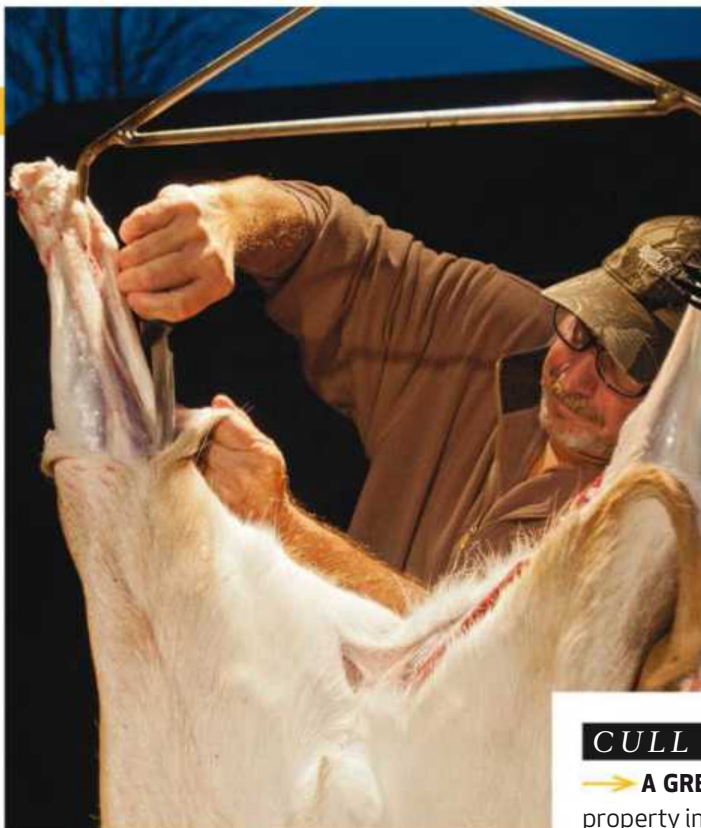


EURASIAN COLLARED DOVES

➔ **THESE BIRDS WERE** escapees from an aviary in the Bahamas in the 1970s. They then flew on to Florida, and have since spread across the country. States like Idaho and Colorado allow hunters to harvest Eurasian doves in any numbers at any time, so long as they have a valid hunting license. (You'll need to leave the birds unplucked during transport so they will not be mistaken for mourning doves.) One area where you'll find a lot of collared doves and plenty of landowners willing to allow you to shoot them is Colorado's Front Range, an agricultural heart of the country where these invasive doves are thriving. Here, they are considered to be a pest and likely compete with mourning doves and other native bird species for habitat. They are a third larger than mourning doves.

FROM LEFT: ANDREW MCKEAN; NICK MYATT; LANCE KRUEGER





CULL DEER HUNTS

➔ **A GREAT DEAL OF** the prime whitetail property in Texas is leased or privately held, but the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department allows hunters on properties enrolled in its Managed Lands Deer Program to harvest a certain number of cull bucks and does. This means that a single ranch may have an allowance of dozens or even hundreds of does and young bucks, and property managers are often willing to allow hunters to harvest some of their management deer for a very reasonable cost. The price per deer varies from \$50 to \$500, and some property managers expect hunters to pay for room and board while hunting, but it's still a great low-cost, action-packed hunt. Most of the properties in the Managed Lands programs have plenty of deer, so you'll see game every day, making this a great hunt for kids. These hunts are usually very short—often just a day or two—so you won't have to burn all your winter vacation days. In addition, the warm Texas winter is a welcome reprieve for snowbound hunters from farther north. Aside from having the opportunity to take several whitetails, you may also be able to harvest wild hogs on many of these hunts, sometimes at no additional cost.



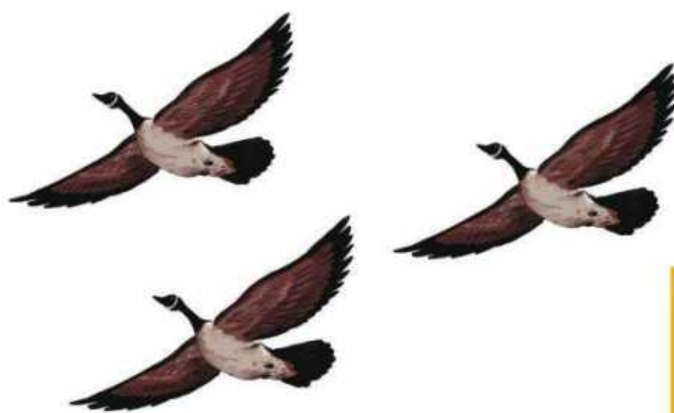


NO-LIMIT GEESE

➔ **SNOW, BLUE, AND ROSS'** geese, known collectively as "light" geese, are causing major problems for farmers along the Mississippi Flyway. Equally alarming is the rate at which they are degrading the Arctic and sub-Arctic tundra areas upon which dozens of other waterfowl species depend. To combat this, a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's order allow hunters more freedom and greater bag limits.

"You can use electronic callers and extended magazine tubes," says DU's Chris Jennings, who also points out that no bag limits allows you to fill your freezer in a hurry. "You can basically start hunting light geese in Louisiana and follow the migration north."

When it comes to his favorite goose recipe, Jennings says the first 20 or 30 pounds of meat are always dedicated to making sausage. But he also likes jerky and says that several other hunters in his area turn snow geese into andouille sausage, a delicacy of the flyway.



WILD HOGS

➔ **FERAL HOG POPULATIONS** are found in all 67 Florida counties. And as their numbers increase, so do conflicts with farmers, ranchers, and even suburbanites. Florida has a policy that allows private landowners to grant permission to hunt hogs on their property year-round. No hunting license is required, and there are no bag limits or age restrictions. Young hogs provide wonderful meat, and every pig you harvest helps control the booming population. Plus, winter is the ideal time to find a pig during the day.

"Cooler weather gets hogs up and moving during daylight hours—especially those big trophy boars," says T.R. Lewis of Black Tine Outfitters near Ocala. And, Lewis says, Florida hog hunts are very affordable—oftentimes less than the cost of a plane ticket.

Of course, Florida is just one option for wild-hog hunting. Pigs are considered nuisance animals in other states, including Texas, Georgia, Mississippi, and Louisiana.



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BUMPER CROP

SOME STATES ALLOW DRIVERS
TO MAKE THE BEST OF
COLLISIONS WITH WILDLIFE BY
SALVAGING THE ROADKILL

BY JESS FIELD

➔ My father says there are two kinds of people: those who have hit deer, and those who will hit deer.

I entered the second group while driving home to Missoula, Mont., after a weekend at my parents' north-central Montana farm. The entire incident—from seeing the whitetail doe sail over the barbed-wire fence along the highway to the impact with my car—took less than a second. But the guilt I felt at unintentionally taking a deer's life stayed with me even longer than the significant dent in my vehicle's body.

Luckily, I had a way to ease my conscience: by utilizing the meat from the deer. In 2013, Montana's state legislature passed a law allowing the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Department to establish the Vehicle-Killed Wildlife Salvage Permit. Because of this provision, I was able to take that doe, whose body sustained only minimal damage, and butcher her when I got home.

I'm not the only remorseful driver who has taken meat from road-killed game. Two years into the program, Montana FWP has issued almost 1,650 permits. More than 1,000 were used on whitetails, 281 on mule deer, and 276 on elk. Sixty-one moose and 11 antelope have also been legally salvaged. Sixty-five percent of these salvaged animals were classified as "found by roadside." The remainder were designated "hit by my vehicle."

In Montana, permits can only be issued for deer, elk, moose, and antelope. Idaho allows drivers to salvage black bears and bighorn sheep in addition to more common big-game species. In Ohio, anyone wanting to legally salvage a deer is required to obtain a "carcass receipt," but the numbers are not tracked statewide. Louisiana and a handful of other states require game wardens to inspect the carcass before the motorist can take possession, verifying that the animal was killed by a vehicle and not some other means. Salvaging roadkill is prohibited in California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Texas, and Alaska.

ACCIDENTAL ENTRÉE

It was difficult, at first, to wrap my mind around eating something killed by my vehicle instead of my bullet or arrow. Before utilizing the permit system, I pictured roadkill as putrid rabbits or flattened skunks, not prime wild meat. Pulling that first package of salvaged steak from the freezer somehow felt wrong, and once it thawed, I inspected it with much more scrutiny than I would any meat I had collected by hunting. I smelled it. I judged it for signs of unacceptable discoloration or bruising.

But any apprehension I had vanished when I took the first bite. It was as tasty and tender as any doe I might have killed in my father's alfalfa field. I immediately realized the purpose of the FWP permit system. Now the meat in my freezer identified with a red "R" in permanent marker is prized, not only for its quality, but because it has allowed me to make the best of an unfortunate situation.



ROADKILL RECORD

Although the majority of states allow vehicle-killed wildlife to be salvaged, few keep detailed records like Montana. The following were provided by state officials and represent species legally salvaged along roadsides in 2014.

IDAHO

472 whitetail deer
372 mule deer
185 elk
79 moose
12 pronghorns
7 mountain lions
4 black bears
4 bighorn sheep
3 wild turkeys
2 gray wolves

MAINE

3,163 whitetail deer
125 moose
31 black bears
36 wild turkeys

MICHIGAN

128 whitetail deer
2 black bears

IOWA

2,389 whitetail deer

KANSAS

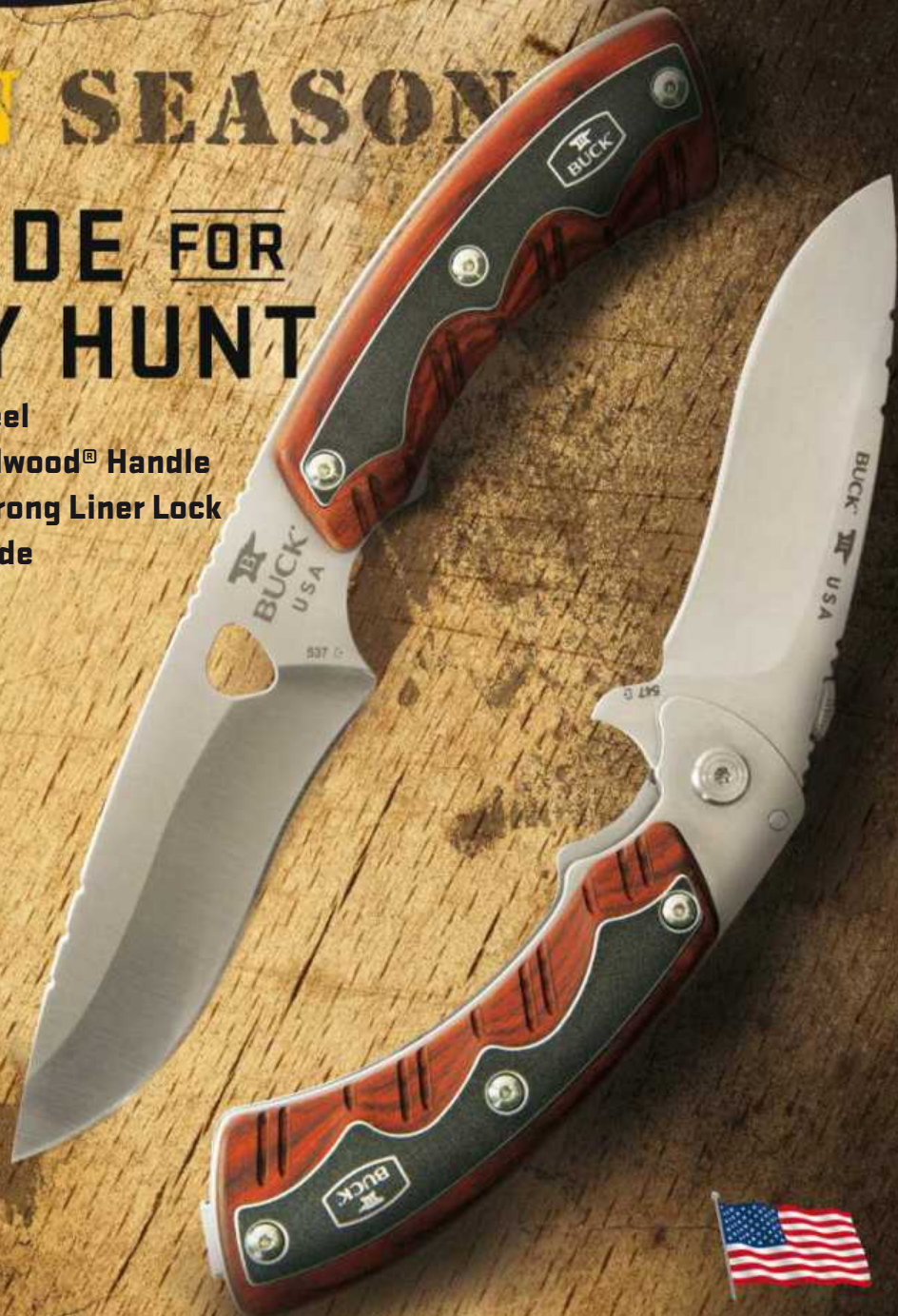
698 whitetail deer



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LATE-SEASON COW ELK

➔ **EARLY AUTUMN** is a great time to chase elk. The weather is usually mild, there's little snow, and the bulls are bugling. Winter, however, might offer better odds of filling the freezer with venison. After the first serious snowfall, elk begin concentrating in winter pastures, and it's easier to set up on a food source than to pull a herd bull away from his harem. Plus, you'll find that many ranchers have tags and are willing to offer short hunts at a bargain price.

"Hunters can get a cow on a two-day hunt, and our success rate has been 100 percent," says Jim Fauver of Castle Valley Outdoors in Emery, Utah. Castle Valley offers ranch permits for cows, so there's no draw, and Fauver says that you can expect to see herds of 30 to 300 animals in their wintering areas on the ranch.

Tyler Willis of Timber Canyon Ranch in Wyoming agrees. "A cow elk hunt is an affordable way for friends and family to get together and enjoy themselves on a laid-back, late-season Wyoming hunt," says Willis. "Over-the-counter licenses make this hunt a great opportunity to bring elk meat home season after season."





SWAMP RATS

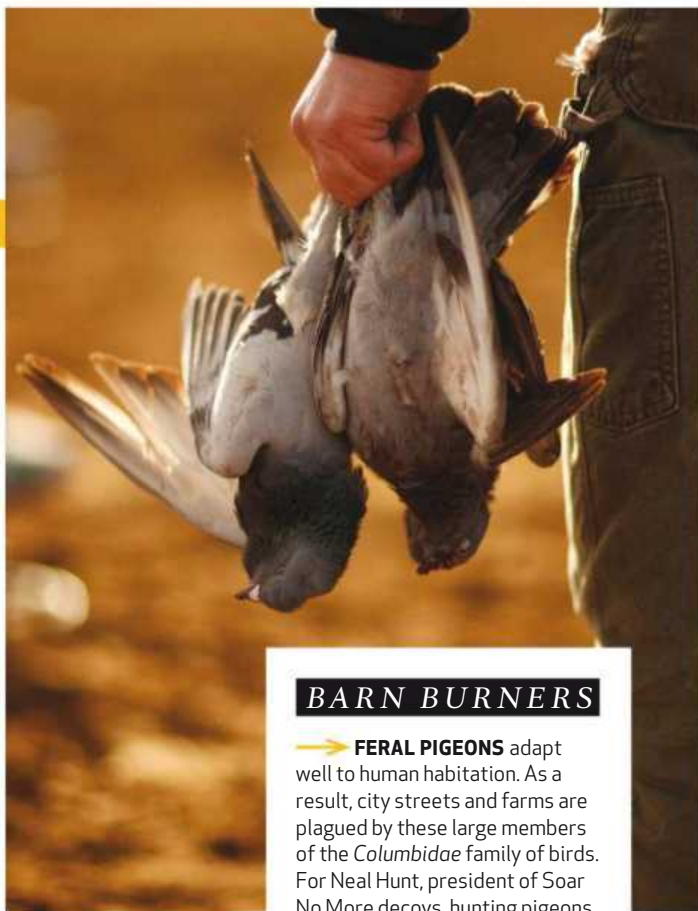
➔ **IN THE 1930s**, large, brown, rat-like furbearing rodents called nutria were introduced into Louisiana from Argentina as a potential source of profit for local trappers. However, when the fur market went into a rapid decline in the 1980s, nutria became a nuisance that destroyed coastal wetlands. Today, these prolific rodents can be hunted along the coastlines of Louisiana. And at 15 pounds each, they provide an ample source of protein.

"Nutria are responsible for thousands of acres of marsh and delta destruction in Louisiana," says Capt. Jeff Dauzat of Fin and Feather Guide Service in Louisiana. "They eat plant roots and tubers—when there's no root systems, there's no marsh."

Dauzat says that the crash in nutria fur prices has reduced the incentive to hunt these invasive rodents, but Louisiana is offering a bounty system. Dauzat says that since the nutria have no natural predators except alligators and humans, the bounty system is the only thing that keeps populations in check. But, he says, if more people knew just how tasty nutria are, there might be more hunters.

"Nutria are good to eat if prepared properly. I have had nutria chili, sauce piquant, and burritos."

You can hunt nutria by stalking riverbanks and levees with a .22 rifle. But if you want to really load up the freezer, hire a local captain to take you out into the swamps to up your odds of success.



BARN BURNERS

➔ **FERAL PIGEONS** adapt well to human habitation. As a result, city streets and farms are plagued by these large members of the *Columbidae* family of birds. For Neal Hunt, president of Soar No More decoys, hunting pigeons has become a way of life.

"Why should people hunt pigeons? It's the most fun wing-shooting anyone could do in the off-season," says Hunt. "Pigeon hunting is duck hunting times 10. No season, no limits, and no plugs, and the birds decoy just like mallards in a pothole. You're not fighting for spots in the morning, and you're not freezing your butt off. What more could a bird hunter want?"

Hunt also says that pigeon hunting is a great way to introduce kids to the sport. And it's a great warmup for waterfowl season—shooting more than a hundred birds over decoys is perfect training for your retriever—or cool-down once game seasons come to an end.

Pigeons are an underrated source of natural protein, according to Hunt. "Taste just like dove. If you love eating doves, you will like pigeon. It's practically the same."



There is something **TERRIBLY WRONG** with the Home Security Industry

Hi. Maybe you've been broken into before, or maybe you haven't. But if you ever decide to protect your home against unfortunate events like that, you're in for a shock. We don't want to scare you off of protecting your home, because honestly, it's really important that you do it. But we feel responsible for sharing these facts with you: Most alarm companies take advantage of people who want to feel safe. They offer you a "free" outdated alarm, but then require you to sign a long-term contract full of nasty fine print. It's pretty sickening really...but this isn't going to be all bad news. There is a better way to protect your home—get a SimpliSafe home security system. Our founder, a Harvard engineer, studied the alarm industry and found all kinds of problems with it. He designed SimpliSafe to fix them, so you can be safe, without having to spend a fortune or sign any contracts. SimpliSafe is wireless, you can order it online, and it's easy to install yourself—anyone can do it. It fits any home, apartment, or business. And it's more affordable, more reliable, and stronger than just about anything else out there.

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—Dave Ramsey, financial expert & New York
Times bestselling author



THE
MEAT ISSUE

BUTCHER BETTER

EVER WONDER WHAT HAPPENS
TO YOUR GAME AFTER YOU DROP
IT OFF AT THE PROCESSOR?
WHAT WE LEARNED WORK-
ING THE FLOOR OF A FAMILY
BUTCHER SHOP DURING THE
BUSIEST WEEKEND OF THE
HUNTING SEASON WILL MAKE
YOU A MORE EFFICIENT
AND EFFECTIVE
GAME PROCESSOR



BY
PJ DELHOMME

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY BENJAMIN RASMUSSEN



Fresh meat
hanging at
Yellowstone
Processing in
Montana.



**BEHIND A WALL OF HEAD-
LESS, UPSIDE-DOWN
HANGING ELK CAR-
CASSES, BUZZ JONES
STANDS ON A STEPLAD-
DER TRIMMING AROUND
EACH ANIMAL'S HOCK
BEFORE HE HOOKS THE
LOOSE FLAP OF SKIN TO A
MOTORIZED HIDE PULLER.
WITHIN SECONDS, THE
ELK IS SKINNED, LEFT
WEARING NOTHING BUT
SOME FAT, A WHOLE LOT
OF MEAT, AND A BLOODY
MANILA TAG WITH THE
HUNTER'S NAME.**

Fourteen years ago, Buzz paid me \$7.50 an hour to stand at a cutting table for 10 hours a day with a meat hook in one hand and a knife in the other. Now, on a chilly weekend in early November, I'm back at Yellowstone Processing to see how this family business has thrived over the years, and to get a hands-on reminder of exactly what it takes to turn a hunter's trophy into steaks, roasts, and burger.

THE MEAT MAN

At 61, Buzz is a sixth-generation Montanan and seasonal business man—concrete in the summer, head ski-lift operator in the winter, and butcher in the fall. His father was a year-round butcher in Bozeman, Mont. After work, he'd pick up Buzz to make house calls during hunting season. "We'd be out until 10 or 11 at night," says Buzz. "I'd wrap and trim burger." Buzz was in first grade.

A barrel of a man with a graying red beard, Buzz could be the freewheeling little brother Santa Claus never had. With a tattered sweatshirt, he has an easy chuckle that echoes through the labyrinth

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

YOU ONLY NEED ONE KNIFE TO PROCESS AN ANIMAL. BUT AS WITH ANY TASK, HAVING THE RIGHT TOOLS MAKES IT A LOT EASIER. TO BUTCHER AN ANIMAL FROM START TO FINISH, I LIKE TO USE THE KNIVES ILLUSTRATED HERE AND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.



THE SKINNER

The key characteristic of a skinner is the curved tip. It allows you to quickly separate the hide from the meat without puncturing the hide—if you're careful. Once you try this knife, you'll never go for your pocketknife to skin again. It also can be used to carve off fat with minimal damage to the meat.



←
Clockwise from
top: Buzz Jones
takes in a muley
buck; bloody
hands and a new
tag; Patti Jones
takes inventory;
a Skinner goes
to work on a bull
elk; cleaning up a
hindquarter.



A 6x6 bull elk begins its long journey shortly after being taken in the field. From here, it will be skinned, broken down, boned out, chopped up, and bagged. Then it will hit the grill and, finally, the hunter's plate.

GAME PROCESSING GOURMET SAUSAGES





Two hunters
talk with Cole
Stanwyck (back
right) after he has
unloaded their elk.



that is Yellowstone Processing. The shop sits right off I-90 between Bozeman and Livingston, just north of Yellowstone National Park. Buzz's blade is typically the first stop on an elk's journey from carcass to chops, steaks, and burger. And he's the first guy to greet hunters as they back up to the intake area.

"I like meeting people and being a part of the hunt," says Buzz. "People bring their kids in, and we become part of the hunting story."

This afternoon, the pickups outside the shop begin to line up as the first cold front of the season slams into town, kicking up clouds of dirt. Everyone standing outside tucks their head inside upturned coat collars like frightened turtles.

A few hunters run into the shop, where Buzz's wife, Patti, is there to take their order. A native of nearby Butte, Patti has been working alongside Buzz for the past 15 years. During hunting season, they live in an apartment attached to the shop and take animals at nearly every hour of the day. Hunters request sausage or jerky, and if they killed an elk, they typically want a little of everything. All of the sausage and jerky is made in the back, where speakers blast David Allen Coe almost as often as they do Bob Marley.

Waiting patiently in the crowd of camo is elementary school teacher Ashley Capobianco with her first deer. She got married about a month ago, and her husband, Nick, is by her side.

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



THE BREAKING KNIFE

If the skinner is short, curvy, and stocky, this is the slimmer and longer, yet still curvy, version. The extra length helps you get into places like the hip joint when quartering. The knife is also good for cutting and butterflying steaks and separating muscle groups of large roasts in the hindquarters.

BREAK IT DOWN



Hanging the carcass from the hind legs is Buzz and the author's preferred method.

Once you have the animal skinned, the real fun begins. Breaking an animal into workable chunks is like riding a bike: Do it once and you'll remember how to every season. Hang the carcass head-down by its hocks for the entire process. I like to use a meat hook in my left hand.

FRONT SHOULDERS

- Removing the shoulder blades is easy. Pull one leg out to the side and slice away under the armpit.

BACKSTRAPS

- These choice steaks run along the spine. With the deer facing away from you, draw an imaginary line from the end of the rib cage around to the top of the hindquarters. (Remember, the deer is hanging upside down.) Make your first horizontal cut here. Then, with a vertical cut, closely follow either side of the spine as far down as you can. I take my cuts well into the neck. Finally, insert your knife back into the first horizontal cut. Turn it 45 degrees so the blade points to the ground and sits on top of the ribs. Skim your knife along the top of the ribs as you cut toward the floor. Your backstrap should peel away easily.

TRIM

- At this point, trim rib and neck meat for burger. Before you bring over the garbage can, grab those tenderloins inside the carcass.

THE HIND

- With the hindquarters remaining, you have a decision to make. You can cut the meat off each quarter while the carcass hangs, saw through the middle of the pelvis, or remove each quarter from the pelvic bone individually. I prefer the last option because it's also what I typically end up with after quartering an animal in the field.

To get the quarter off the pelvis, find the ball-and-socket joint by following the femur from the knee. Slice the tendons that hold the ball to the joint. Now, find the pelvic bone and slowly shave the meat away using your knife. There is more meat there than you think. —P.J.D.

**BACKSTRAP**

Leave whole and grill for your pals or butterfly and save for yourself.

**NECK MEAT TRIM**

Grind neck meat for burger, sausage, or jerky.

**SHOULDER**

The majority of your ground meat comes from the shoulders.

**FRONT SHANK**

Avoid trying to trim off shanks. Instead, saw through the leg.

**REAR SHANK**

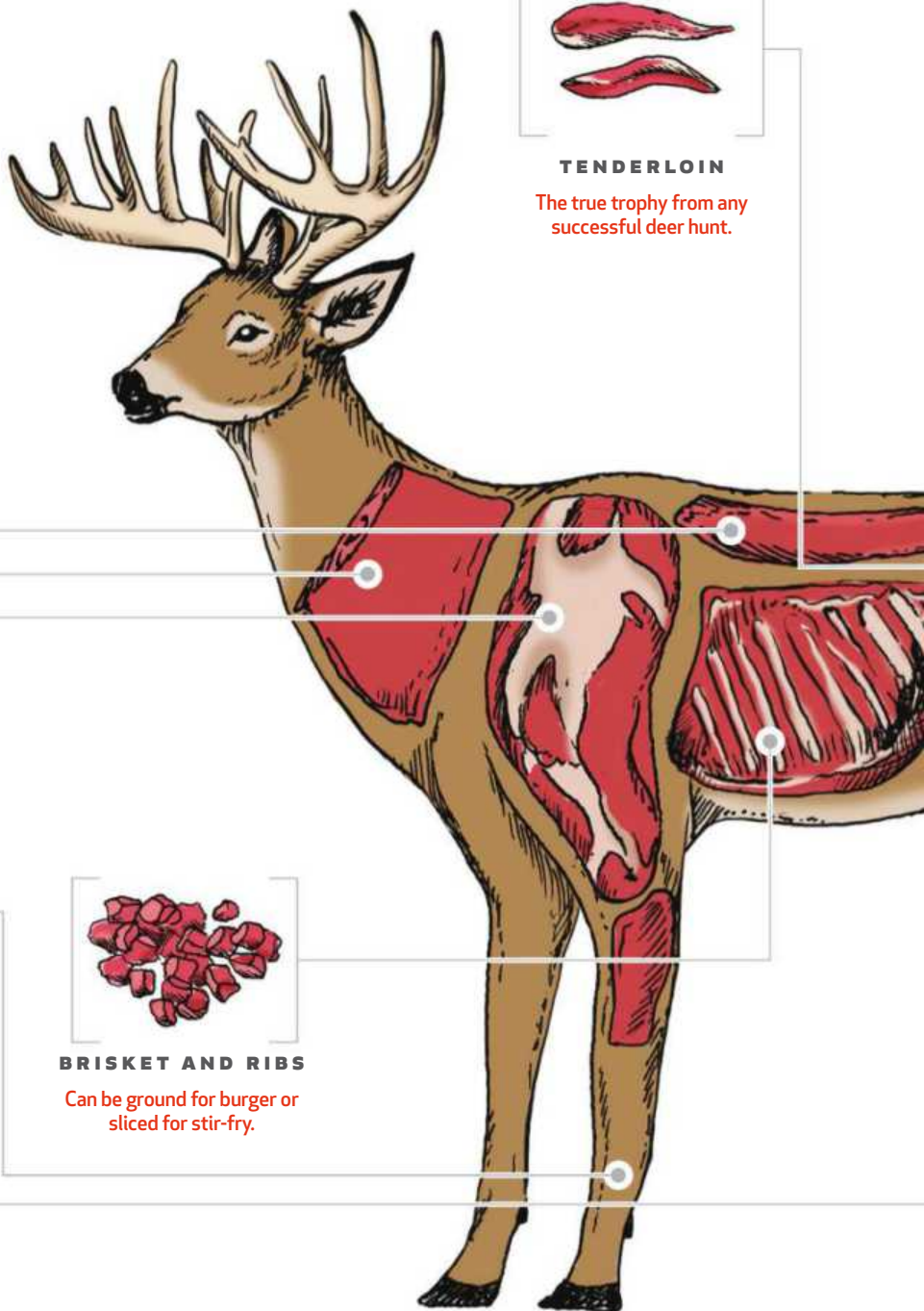
Shank meat goes in the slow cooker.

**TENDERLOIN**

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**BRISKET AND RIBS**

Can be ground for burger or sliced for stir-fry.



THE CUTS



HINDQUARTER

When in doubt, cut good-looking hindquarter meat into steaks. Follow the connective tissue lines. You can't go wrong.



A lot of meat lovers throw around terms like “eye of round,” “brisket,” and “T-bone,” and that’s great. But how does that translate to game animals? If you’re like me, chances are all you need to know are what cuts are good for grilling, grinding, or stewing in the slow cooker. Consider this Venison Cuts 101.

Front shoulder and trim meat becomes burger or sausage. Backstraps and tenderloins are either butterfly-cut for deer or cut into 1- to 2-inch-thick medallions for elk.

The hindquarter holds the most varied options of roasts and steaks, and that’s where I focus much of my time when butchering.

To bone out the hindquarter, find the ball joint on the inside of the leg. At that joint, trace the bone with your knife, cutting the meat as you work your way down to the knee joint. Work your knife around the entire femur until you trim all the meat away. (If you’re feeling ambitious, saw through the lower leg bone for the shanks.)

Then make two cuts: one just above the knee joint and one behind. Ideally, the meat should fall off in one big chunk. On your butcher table at home, break down the chunk using a fillet knife, following the natural lines of the connective tissue. Soon you’ll see all those steaks and roasts unfold before your eyes.

You can really do no wrong with any cuts off the hindquarter if you follow the natural lines of the muscle. Some I cut into steaks, while others I leave whole for the slow cooker. Bottom round and eye round make good stews and pot roast. Top sirloin and top round are best for steaks and sautéing. —P.J.D.

“She dumped it at 150 yards,” he says with a smile. “Right through the heart. She dressed it out herself, which is funny because she can’t get blood drawn without passing out.”

Ashley laughs and adds that she told her class at Hyalite Elementary she was going hunting and they wished her luck. Turns out fourth-graders are decent luck charms.

Inside, Patti is chatting with a hunter but spots me out of the corner of her eye. She drops her pen and gives me a hug. It’s been a while since we last saw each other. Back in the day, my job was to trim sinew, fat, and hair off of chunks of meat thrown on the table. I drove home the first night using only my right hand; my left had cramped up like an eagle’s talon. I made it through that entire season, though, which isn’t always the case. Back then, there were maybe seven employees, most of them related to Buzz and Patti. Now, Buzz has at least 30, only eight of whom are brand-new. And even though he starts them at \$11 an hour now, I don’t think I could ever sling meat on that scale again for an entire season.

BUTCHER BUMS

“There’s a certain type of person who thrives in a place like this,” says assistant manager Ryan Harris, who’s been with the shop for eight years. “People who aren’t afraid of work, work here. We’ve had our share of people not come back after their first lunch break.” Harris wears an elk tooth around his neck. At 12, he arrowed his first elk while hunting with his dad. At 28, he’s still looking to kill another one. After the season is over, he will head up to Bridger Bowl, the local ski hill, to work as a lift operator for his ninth season. “I think of this place

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



THE BONING KNIFE

If you’ve already quartered your animal to pack it out, then you’re going to need to get that meat off the bone. A boning knife is shorter and lacks the curves of the breaker. As you work your way around a femur or scapula, you’ll appreciate the knife’s flexibility.

as ski bums working for ski bums," he says.

For Harris, Yellowstone Processing is more than a job. When his mom had some health issues and had to move in with him, the only person he felt he could talk to about it was Patti. "I work for them because I know they care about me and the rest of us," Harris says. "I bust my ass for them, even when Buzz gets ornery. And with every season that I come back, I feel more like family."

Harris works as a breaker on the week-day shift. After the animal is skinned, his job is to cut off the four quarters, backstraps, neck meat, brisket, flank steaks, and any other good-looking meat. Bloodshot meat gets trimmed and tossed in the dumpster. There just isn't time to trim away the jellied clumps to save a couple of pounds of trim. As he slices, he tosses meat onto one of two tables, where six cutters wait to do the job I used to do, with one very big difference: Instead of hosing off hair and bloodshot with cold water, the cutters use a propane torch to lightly burn off any hair. The aroma isn't inviting, but it beats working cold and wet all day.

Harris stresses that for hunters to get the most out of their meat, it all starts with that first, and hopefully only, shot. "So much meat is wasted on a bad shot," he says. Once down, the animal needs to be gutted completely, including cracking open the chest to get the esophagus out. "If you leave in any organs—especially the windpipe—it traps heat, and those enzymes work quickly to destroy your meat."

FAMILY BUSINESS

From the cutting table, the meat makes its way into a bus tub, typically two for

SAVE BLOODSHOT MEAT

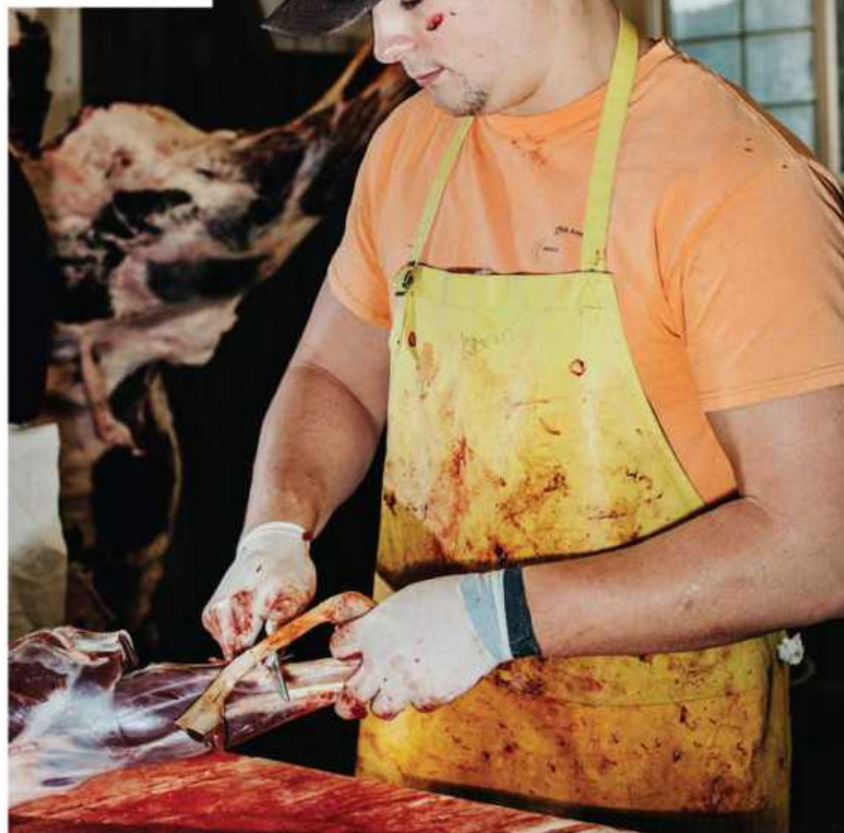
- Unless you shoot an animal in the head, you're going to have to deal with some amount of internal destruction caused by your bullet. Typically, you encounter one or two mangled front shoulder blades. At the processor, a lot of that wreckage goes in the trash. It is full of bone, lead fragments, and bloodshot—that snot-textured mass of bloody mess.

If you're cleaning meat outside, use a hose with a spray nozzle and stick it inside the bullet hole to flush what you can, then trim any undesirable bone or destroyed meat. You don't want a bullet or bone chip to go through the grinder. Salvage what you can.

If you shoot an animal in the hindquarters, the same technique as above applies. Keep in mind that you lose a lot of choice cuts with poorly placed shots. More time at the range should be on your agenda for next season.



Cutters work the tables to clean meat of coagulated blood and hair. The better your shot, the more meat you get back.



TOOLS OF THE TRADE



THE FILLET KNIFE

To trim the silver skin from roasts and backstraps, I like to use a very sharp fillet knife. The ample flexibility helps you cut just under the silver skin and keeps a lot of meat from ending up in the dog bowl.



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←
A package of sausage ready for the freezer. Yellowstone Processing uses its own recipes for brats and Italian and Polish sausages.

a deer and five for an elk. The manila tag follows on top of the meat. On the weekends, Koby Richins, Buzz's son-in-law, works the steak table, making clean chunks of meat into chops, steaks, or burger trim. During the week, his wife and cutting room manager, Jackie Jones, works the cutting table. She's been working here since they opened. Their seven-year-old daughter, Sahara, was practically pitching in by the time she could walk.

"We have pictures of her at a few months old, drooling all over herself, sitting in her little bouncy chair while Jackie cut steaks," says Koby. "When Jackie needed to take care of Sahara, someone would step in and keep cutting. As a family, we all help out. It's the whole it-takes-a-village mentality. That's how it is here."

Sahara comes in on the weekends to help make sausage. "She knows where her food comes from," says Koby. "And that's important, because there's a huge disconnect from where the food comes from and the whole process of growing and raising your own food, especially in our society. Everything is right there at the grocery store."

Jackie comes to work after dropping Sahara at school. It's a way to get a paycheck. But for Jackie, it's also some well-needed social time for a stay-at-home mom. "Having the crew around brings some excitement to my life," she says with a laugh. And while the crew is made up predominantly of men, that doesn't

bother her. "I was raised by my dad, and when the testosterone level gets too high, that's when I plug in my headphones. It can get pretty crude back there."

Most of the time, the front shoulders are turned into burger; the hindquarters are where steaks and roasts sit in one giant mass until Jackie unfolds it. Following the natural seams of the meat, she separates rounds from sirloin, trims sinew, and then moves on to backstraps.

Depending on the order, the meat and tag will go back in their tubs to the packaging area. Steaks get vacuum-sealed, while the trim gets ground into burger or sausage. Or it will go to Buzz's new \$60,000 smoker, located where Sahara's nursery used to be. For most hunters who fill their tag early in the season, it can take only a couple of weeks to get their meat back, barring any specialty jerky or sausage orders. Once the season gets moving, it could take a couple of months or more.

GIVING BACK

Some hunters choose to donate some or their entire animal to local food banks. And thanks to Safari Club's Sportsmen Against Hunger program, as well as the Hunters Against Hunger program, the cost of processing is covered. Montana legislation, passed in 2013, offers hunters a voluntary hunter donation check-off on each license application for the Hunters Against Hunger program. ■

AGING EXPLAINED



- Hanging meat allows the enzymes within the muscles to break down complex proteins. This helps enhance flavor and tenderize the meat. Plus, it gives you a chance to relive the hunt with the neighborhood while drinking a beer in the garage.

Ideally, you'll want the ambient temperature where the meat is hanging to be around 40 degrees. If it's much warmer than that, bacteria will grow more rapidly and it will shorten your hang time as those enzymes work more aggressively. If it's very warm, let your nose be your guide. If it starts to smell odd—even a little—it's time to cut it up. If things get sticky or slimy, that's another indication. If it gets warm in the day but stays cool at night, I'll put some frozen water jugs in the chest cavity. And if at all possible, I keep the hide on until I'm ready to cut it up. It keeps the meat clean and prevents the outer layers of meat from drying out.

If I shoot a young buck, I'll hang it only a couple of days. A rutted-up mature stud? I'll let it hang for a week if the temperature is ideal. One thing you should never do is let the animal freeze solid with the hide on. It halts the aging process and makes it a drudgery to skin. —P.J.D.

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5 WAYS TO WASTE MEAT



1 Making a poor first shot. The quality and amount of meat you harvest all comes down to that first shot. An animal shot once in the vitals, without its even knowing you're there, is the best thing you can do.

2 Delaying field dressing. The longer you leave in blood and guts, the more likely the processor will call the game warden and report you for wanton waste. You have to get the entrails out and open up your animal if you want to eat the best-tasting meat around.

3 Letting it sit on the ground overnight. Hang quarters in a nearby tree or shove some logs underneath the carcass. You need cool air to flow around the animal.

4 Leaving too much hair and tendon. The best way to get kids to stop eating venison is having them find a hair in their sloppy Joe or, even worse, a piece of silver skin they could chew on for days. Clean your meat with a passion for quality.

5 Not sharing it with friends and family. Are you really going to eat all that? I'm sure you could, but where's the fun in that? —P.J.D.

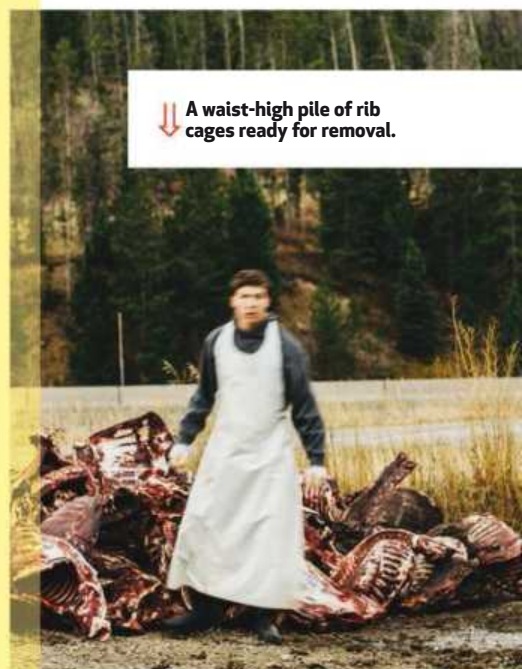
In its first season, the program generated \$70,000 and more than 35,000 pounds of wild game. Compared to some states—like Iowa, which receives more than 300,000 pounds of donated meat—it may not seem like a lot. But for hungry Montana families, it makes a difference.

"It has proven so successful because it echoes with Montanans—the hunters, the processors, and the people who use the food pantries," says Jeff Gutierrez, chief programs officer at Montana Food Bank network. Hunters from all walks participate in the program, such as **Janice and Don Ledbetter of Dallas**. Don, an attorney, killed his elk earlier in the year. On their trip back up to Montana, Janice killed a good bull and a great mule deer, **both her first**. They donated 68 pounds of burger to the Food Bank. All told, Yellowstone Processing sent 6,000 pounds of meat, mostly deer and elk, to their local food bank in 2014.

CALM BEFORE THE STORM

As the sun starts to set on another week-end of Montana's hunting season, there is a lull in the action at the shop. The successful morning hunters are long gone. The successful evening hunters are still afield, packing out their elk and deer, and calling all their buddies. For the workers, it's a time to grab a quick dinner, a smoke, or a cup of coffee.

Before long, the wind picks up again and snowflakes move in every direction but down. A line of truck headlights begins to migrate in our direction



↓ A waist-high pile of rib cages ready for removal.

through the oncoming storm.

My family is in one of those trucks, coming to pick me up. I want them to meet Buzz and Patti and the crew. My kids, 5 and 2, are cautiously curious about the piles of heads, antlers, rib cages, and hides. On the way home, they will pepper me with questions.

But before I leave, Buzz and I shake hands. All joking aside, he tells it to me straight: "We got to keep this going. Hunting really isn't a bad way to raise your family."

I couldn't agree more. ☐☐☐

BY THE NUMBERS

THE STATS FOR THE 2014 HUNTING SEASON AT YELLOWSTONE PROCESSING

6,000 LB.

MEAT SENT TO THE FOOD BANK, MOSTLY DEER AND ELK, BUT SOME ANTELOPE, MOOSE, AND BEAR



149,764 POUNDS OF STEAKS, CHOPS, AND ROASTS CUT



36,400 POUNDS OF SAUSAGE AND JERKY PRODUCED

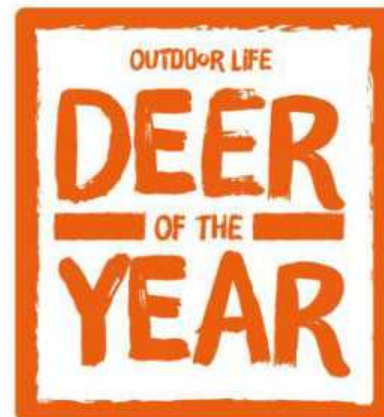




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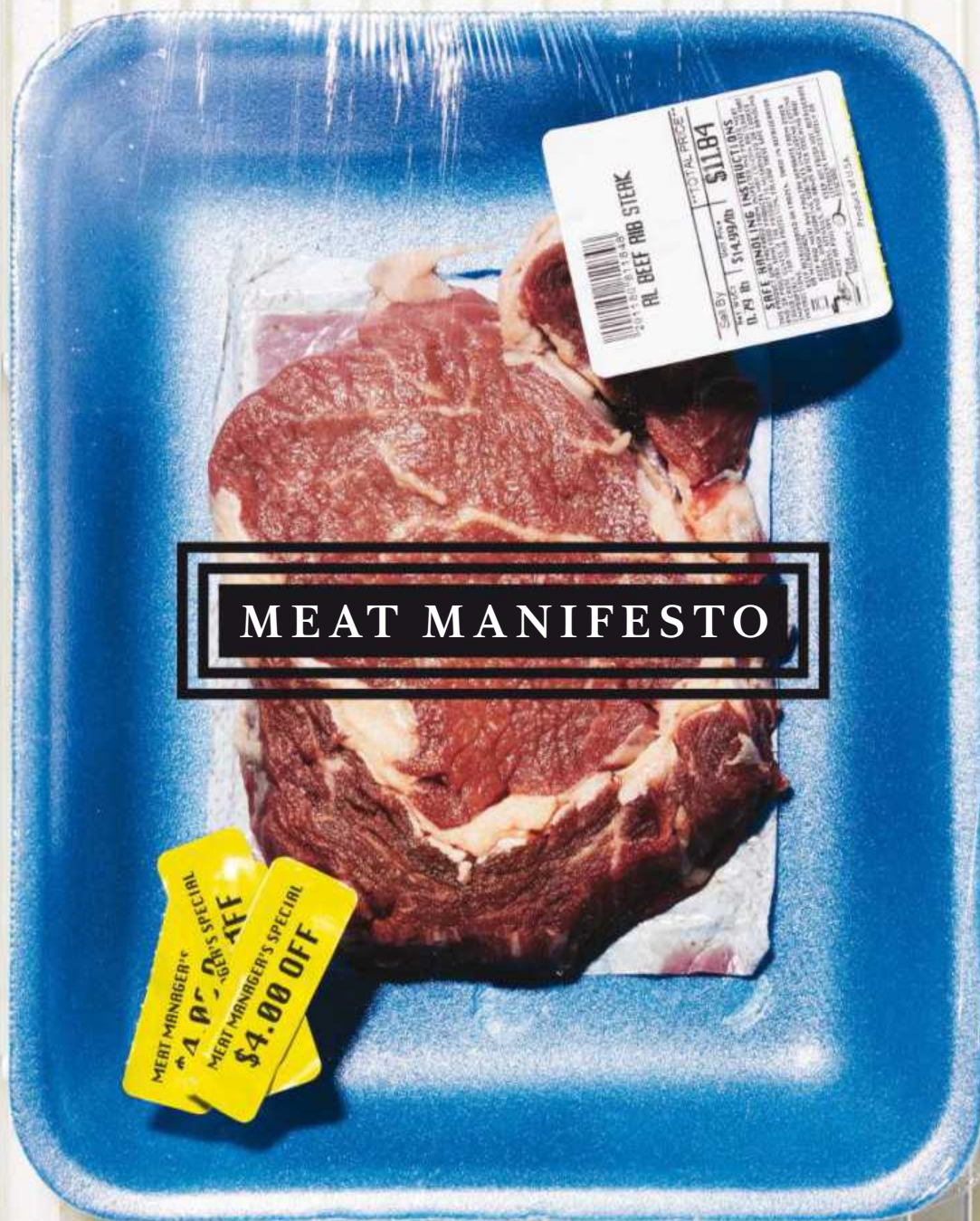
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MEDIUM RARE

While the health and ecological costs of farmed meat are well documented, little is known about the value of wild meat.



MEAT MANIFESTO

BY SHANE MAHONEY

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JONATHON KAMBOURIS



**T H E
F U T U R E O F
H U N T I N G
D E P E N D S
O N O U R
A D V O C A C Y
O F W I L D
P R O T E I N**

WHEN YOU SHARE MEAT FROM A DEER, or a duck, or a fish you have killed, you are participating in an essential human sacrament. It was wild meat that made us who we are. And it was hunters who supplied the meat that led to the many profound physical changes that would ultimately determine our survival and success as a species.

Highly nutritious and easy to digest, meat enabled us to modify and shorten our digestive systems and to more efficiently fuel our expanding brains. As our mental capacity increased, so did our capacity for reasoning, communication, and tool production.

While these proved essential talents for effective hunting, they also represent some of the most defining characteristics of our humanness. Our expanding brain development had other effects as well. Most significantly, it enabled shorter breast-feeding periods, earlier weaning of children, and thus shorter times between births, greatly enhancing our potential for population increase.

While the pursuit and killing of wild animals for food may be contentious in some circles, its influence upon human development cannot be denied. Hunting encouraged cooperation and food sharing, values we still cherish and practice today, and which are among the best of our human inclinations. The animals we pursued and consumed fueled our biological success. Far more than this, they literally made us human.

Today, the harvest of wild meat and fish remains a necessity in many parts of the world. While it may not be a necessity for most of us, it remains an enduring tradition for more than 50 million citizens of Canada and the U.S.

In both countries, this wild harvest provides an enormous amount of organic food that is shared with a wide circle of family and friends. It reflects the conservation successes of both countries, where productive lands and waters still provide a renewable resource that is shared with perhaps a third of their citizenry. The practice of accessing this wild food drives an enormous economy, providing employment and remuneration to thousands of businesses. This creates more than 1.5 million jobs, directly and indirectly, in Canada and the United States, most of these in rural centers.

THE SOCIETAL VALUE OF HUNTING

Those who undertake this wild harvest, the recreational hunters and anglers of North America, are among the premier supporters of wildlife and fish conservation in the world.

Compare the ecological footprint of this enormous harvest of healthy food with that of industrial agriculture. Hunting requires no fertilization, alteration of the landscape; entails no use of pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, feedlots, or industrial slaughterhouses; and necessitates no large waste piles to pollute the air, land, or waters.

Given all of this, and given society's growing demand for natural food, you might think that we would know everything about this wild harvest—how big it is, what it is worth economically, and how costly it would be to replace from

both an economic and environmental point of view. The reality is that we know almost nothing about any of this. What we do know is that replacing our wild harvest with meat from agriculture would require a significant expansion of the current livestock system. This would inevitably result in loss of wildlife habitat and numerous additional environmental impacts due to associated industrial inputs. Furthermore, we know that while food-security concerns continue to intensify globally, policy makers in North America appear to seldom consider our recreational wild harvest as an ecologically sustainable alternative to farmed meat. Instead, they consistently favor agricultural development over conservation of wild land and the wildlife habitat that it protects. It is time for this to change.

We need to inform both the public and the policy makers alike that the recreational harvest of wild meat and fish by the hunters and anglers of Canada and the United States is a vital activity, providing an enormous quantity of high-quality food and contributing mightily to our economies. It is culturally significant, involving food sharing and encouraging healthy outdoor activity. It is one of the extraordinary privileges of citizenship, openly accessible to all who wish to take responsibility for their own food and who wish to contribute to wildlife conservation. Incredibly, most citizens and politicians don't know this.

THE CELLOPHANE TRAY

Our reliance on the industrial meat-supply chain takes us further from the essential human skill of collecting meat from the wild.



ANDREW HARNIK/AP PHOTO

To address these concerns, Conservation Visions Inc., a private company focused on international conservation issues, along with Dallas Safari Club and a host of other partners, has launched the Wild Harvest Initiative, a multi-year effort to collect and analyze the hunting and angling harvest data from jurisdictions across Canada and the U.S. The study is a first of its kind in North America, and the largest ever undertaken anywhere in the world. By compiling this information, the Initiative will demonstrate the importance of wild lands and waters as sources of sustainable food, and will catalyze new conversation about the roles of hunting and angling in our food-production system.

The United States and Canada have long histories of successful land stewardship and conservation, dating back to the late 1800s. One of the key reasons for these successes has been the implementation of the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation. The concepts of democratic access to wildlife and sustainable utilization of wildlife as a source of food are both cornerstones of the model. How future access to wild harvest is governed will be of critical significance to the future of hunting and angling. In both nations, the North American Model of Wildlife Conservation has illustrated that sustainable use of wildlife is entirely compatible with maintaining thriving wildlife populations.

THE POWER OF SHARING MEAT

Most of us do not hunt alone, of course; nor do the majority of us consume all of the meat or fish that we harvest our-

FOOD
SECURITY,
WILDLIFE
SUSTAINABILITY,
LAND
CONSERVATION,
AND
NUTRITION
ARE ALL
TIED TO LEGAL
WILDLIFE
HARVESTS.

selves. We hunt or fish with close associates and distribute our harvest among family members and friends, social traditions of great value and more important than most of us probably realize. A meal of gifted trout or venison invokes feelings of appreciation, especially in those who understand the effort required to harvest the animal. In this way, our harvest of wild animals can play a meaningful role in the lives of hunters and anglers and non-outdoorspeople alike. Wild meat is about sharing. Whether one actually pulls the trigger or sets the hook is somewhat insignificant to the larger conversation.

That is why Conservation Visions hopes to attract a diverse group of partners to this effort, including conservation groups, hunting and fishing organizations, food-security interests, nutritionists, economists, and the outdoor industry and outdoor enthusiasts of all kinds. Everyone who believes in sustainability, conservation, and environmentally friendly food should appreciate what our wild harvest contributes to the health and well-being of our citizens.

The harvest of wildlife is a contentious topic, and every effort must be made to demonstrate its relevance in a modern and rapidly changing world. Food security, sustainability of wildlife, land conservation, nutrition, and economics are all tied to legal and regulated wildlife harvests. To those long separated from these activities by miles of concrete and steel, the mention of hunting and fishing may incite honest inquiry or outright hostility. But the world over, wildlife harvest is an integral part of human cultures and livelihoods. To some, it is a recreational pastime that also provides them with the enjoyment of nutritious and delicious food. To others, it is an absolute necessity for survival. With food-security problems and concerns for promoting healthy diets escalating worldwide, sustainable wildlife harvests have an important role to play. The initiative will illuminate this reality, while at the same time arguing for greater consideration of wildlife to human livelihoods and economies, and in land conservation. The take-home message is clear: Our wild meat is no game.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shane Mahoney, founder and CEO of Conservation Visions Inc., is widely recognized as one of conservation's most passionate spokespersons. A native Newfoundlander, he is a wildlife scientist, and travels the world with his message of the conservation value of hunting and angling.

JASON HORNICK



A YEAR OF MEAT

HOW MUCH WILD PROTEIN DO HUNTERS GATHER IN A SINGLE YEAR? MORE THAN 1,300 TONS IN ARIZONA ALONE, ACCORDING TO THESE LIP-SMACKING STATS

JONATHAN O'DELL IS a curious sort of public servant. A wildlife biologist with Arizona Game and Fish Department, he specializes in the modest critters of the Grand Canyon State. While his colleagues are handling bighorn sheep, mule deer, and giant elk, O'Dell tends to his state's quail, rabbits, and squirrels.

O'Dell's interest in overlooked game animals extends beyond his job. In 2009, he completed the Grand Slam of Squirrels, becoming the first hunter ever to take all eight species of tree squirrels native to the U.S. It was in this pursuit that O'Dell realized the cumulative power of the small and

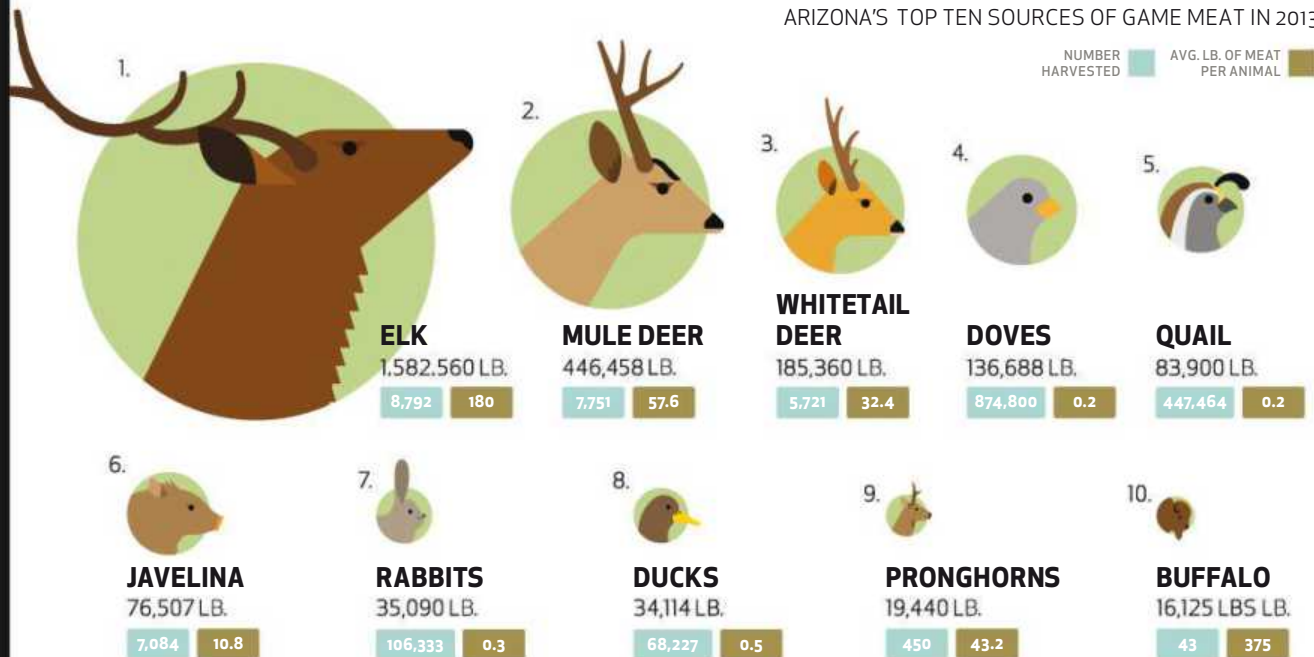
the many. In this case, the astounding amount of meat that small-game animals provide to a nation of hunters over the course of a year.

After hearing Shane Mahoney discuss the Wild Harvest Initiative at a convention of wildlife managers last year, O'Dell decided to quantify the cumulative protein gathered by hunters in a single year. He chose his home state of Arizona, using harvest data from 2013. The information below details the surprising amount of wild meat taken home by hunters: 1.5 million pounds of elk, another 223 tons of mule deer. Even the small critters contribute. O'Dell

estimates that the nearly 900,000 doves killed in Arizona in 2013 totaled more than 136,000 pounds of filleted meat, at 2 ounces per bird. When he also considers angler-caught fish, O'Dell figures hunters and anglers could feed every resident of Arizona one meal of 8 ounces of wild-caught flesh.

What about a state with a robust whitetail deer herd? In Missouri, where the annual deer harvest has averaged 282,605 deer over the past six years, hunters collected more than 14,000 tons of organic, free-ranging meat. That's 4.6 pounds of venison for each of Missouri's 6 million residents.

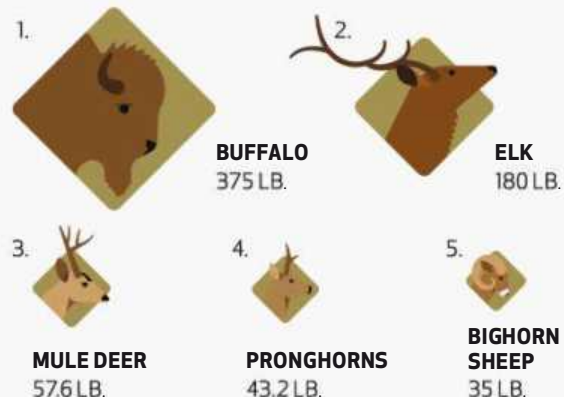
ARIZONA'S TOP TEN SOURCES OF GAME MEAT IN 2013



TOP FIVE ANIMALS HARVESTED BY NUMBER



TOP FIVE ANIMALS AS SOURCES OF MEAT



RECREATIONAL SHOOTING



With a new emphasis on accuracy, the Barrett M107A1 is able to shoot tight groups at 1,000 yards and beyond.

ACCURIZING THE .50 BMG

FROM ANTI-AIRCRAFT GUN TO
PRECISION RIFLE **BY ALEX ROBINSON**

COURTESY OF BARRETT



TURNING IN A sub-MOA group at 1,000 yards (5 shots in a 10-inch circle) is an impressive feat. You can't expect that performance out of a cartridge that was originally designed for substantially larger targets—like fighter planes and ships—right? Don't tell that to Barrett, which has revamped its M107A1 .50 BMG.

"We've been working with this gun for 30 years, and we saw room to make a bunch of improvements all at once," says Chris Barrett, president of the company.

Here's a look at what they did.



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TUNE UP THE AMMO

► **THE FIRST THING** Barrett engineers had to do was get ammo that would fire precisely and consistently. There isn't .50-caliber match-grade ammunition readily available, and much of the .50 BMG ammo out there was made to be fired through a machine gun, Barrett says. That means lower tolerances and mediocre accuracy at best. That might be fine for laying down suppressing fire, but Barrett needed a consistent round to fine-tune its rifle against, so the company decided to load its own ammo.

Barrett used 647-grain Barnes TAC-X, Winchester primed cases, and Alliant Powder Reloader 50 to turn out muzzle velocities of 2,750 fps. It's not a super-high-performing long-range round (with a 100-yard zero it drops about 10.6 mils at 1,000 yards), but it shot consistently, Barrett says. The company is now working with Lapua to develop match-grade ammo that will be available in the near future.

BARREL AND CHAMBER IMPROVEMENTS

► **FROM THERE**, Barrett took over the manufacturing of its barrels, bringing in blanks and running them through its own CNC machine.

It started using match-grade single-point-cut barrels that are hand-lapped, Barrett says.

"This is like what guys are putting on their one-off benchrest rifles. That's what is on our production gun," he says.

Taking over barrel manufacturing also allowed the company to perfectly cut the chamber into the back of the breech. "That improved alignment of the chamber, and better dimensions of the chamber was probably 75 percent of the puzzle," says Chris Barrett.

There was a little slop in the neck and throat of the chamber, and those tolerances were tightened.

"The machine-gun chamber is sort of big and floppy because it has to run on full-auto like a scalded dog in the middle of the desert. A sniper rifle that holds only 10 rounds doesn't see that rate of fire. So, we've optimized our chamber for precision."

TUNING THE ACTION

► **MOST SNIPER RIFLES** are bolt-actions, not recoil-driven semi-autos with a lot of moving parts. On the M107A1, the whole barrel moves back under the recoil of the shot to eject the fired shell and load the next one (the semi-auto

action helps make the recoil surprisingly easy on the shooter).

So, Barrett engineers went through a guess-and-check process, making a single adjustment to the action and then testing a prototype gun to see if the change improved accuracy. Barrett also enhanced its bolt carrier for better alignment between the bolt and barrel.

"We have stacks and stacks of three-ring binders and test reports that back up all these changes," says Chris Barrett.

SUPPRESSOR-READY

► **ADDING WEIGHT** (like a suppressor) to the barrel of a recoil-driven semi-auto changes the dynamics of the action because there's more mass moving back on the gun. So, the company went to work, further tweaking the action to accommodate its suppressor. Because of this, Barrett suggests only using its own suppressor on the gun since that's what the action is tuned for.

"It wasn't just a matter of figuring out how to attach a suppressor to the rifle. We had to make changes to the action, primarily in the bolt carrier, so the rifle could handle the increased speed of the action," Chris Barrett says. "We redesigned a more robust bolt

latch that could handle the extra force without putting any extra pressure on the rest of the rifle."

FIGHTING WEIGHT

► **THE LAST MAJOR** change: Barrett slimmed down the M107A1 by 5 pounds to a dainty 28.7 pounds. The engineers replaced steel parts with titanium in the bipod, monopod, and barrel key. Titanium is lighter than steel but doesn't perform well on sliding parts, so it was used sparingly, Chris says.

The upper receiver became 700 series aluminum, which cut down on weight and made the upper more rigid. "I hate to say anything negative about the old gun, but [the upper] was made of sheet metal, and it's hard to make sheet metal fabrication that straight and that perfect," he explains.

With all of its improvements, the new Barrett costs about \$12,000. In terms of accuracy, what had been a 2 MOA (or more) platform is now capable of 1 MOA, especially once the trigger is mastered through dry-fire practice.

"We're precision shooters and we're tinkers, and we think the people who shoot our guns are, too," says Barrett. "I think they'll appreciate what we've done here."



It costs nearly as much as some cars, and each shot will leave you about \$10 poorer, but nothing replicates the thunderous impact of the .50 BMG downrange.



RECREATIONAL SHOOTING

DIY GEAR



The author with his self-made shooting pillow under his arm during a long-range rifle match in Montana.



TACTICAL LUNCH BOX

HOW TO MAKE A SHOOTING PILLOW FOR CHEAP **BY CHRIS GITTINGS**

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LONG-RANGE TACTICAL

shooting competitions blend physical and mental challenges, technical shooting, time duress, and field conditions. It's essentially an arms race. Match directors create more and more challenging shooting positions, and we solve them. A solution born from necessity, the "pillow" has become the go-to accessory during kneeling and high-prone shooting.

Though ready-made tactical pillows are effective and durable, I've struggled with shelling out \$100 for one. Recently, while

packing for a PRS match, I realized that my procrastination had left me without a good shooting pillow. Panic began to set in. In mere hours, I was most assuredly going to be required to shoot small targets from kneeling positions.

LAST-SECOND FIND

As I entered my garage, I thought, *There has to be something around here I can use.*

After some rummaging, I found one of my kids' soft, insulated lunch boxes. It still had the \$7.99 tag on it. It was roughly the size I needed, and was camouflage to boot.

I stuffed it with an extra jacket, granola bars, and jerky, and threw it into my gear pile.

I started the match on Stage 4, which required the shooters to shoot from the tops of four fence posts, all of varying heights. This would be a perfect time to try out my DIY pillow. I said a quiet prayer that the



By sewing Cordura fabric into cubes that he then fills with bean-bag chair peanuts, the author makes support bags for little money.

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RECREATIONAL SHOOTING
DIY GEAR

The tactical lunch box has become an essential piece of the author's kit for long-range shooting.

pillow would not fall to pieces in the middle of the stage, scattering jerky at the range officer's feet.

I strode confidently to the start line with gun and gear. "What is that?" asked the RO. "It's my tactical lunch box," I replied matter-of-factly. I could see the wheels in his head turning. After about five fairly uncomfortable seconds, he sighed and shook his head, "Whatever. Let's go."

The Tactical Lunch Box (TLB) proved its

utility over three days of shooting. At one point, an RO called it "Gucci equipment." I laughed as I remembered cutting the \$7.99 tag off in my garage.

MODS TO THE SYSTEM

The TLB has become a staple in my kit, and I've discovered ways to improve it. First, I shortened the shoulder strap and installed side-release buckles so that I could strap it to my gun or arm. Next, I sewed corresponding

side-release buckles on the corners so that it clips easily on and off my pack.

After shooting a match that only allowed the use of one rear bag (no stacking of rear bags), I decided to fill the TLB with smaller pillows of various sizes, kind of a Russian matryoshka of TLBs. That time the jacket and jerky found a home elsewhere in my pack.

I purchased some bulk Cordura online, raided my daughter's pink beanbag chair for lightweight fill material, and tracked down the family sewing machine.

Even with rudimentary sewing skills, it is easy to sew two pieces of Cordura into a square, turn it inside out, stuff it with plundered fill, and sew it shut.

Just remember to say that prayer when you step up to the line with your new TLB. If it explodes, you can always buy some replacement jerky with the money you saved.

Deploying the TLB

1 FOR STAGES that require a pillow, you can strap it to the elbow of your dominant hand. This keeps the pillow in place during the stage. However, it can be in the way if you have to get into other positions that do not require pillow deployment.

2 MY FAVORITE alternative is attaching it to my rear stock with about 18 inches of paracord and a large plastic carabiner. Under time pressure, it's easy to locate, and it can be moved out of the way as needed.

3 HUG THE PILLOW into your body with a tight squeeze as you settle into your position.

4 TACTICAL PILLOWS tend to have different dimensions on each side, so rotating the pillow gives you support at varying heights.

5 FINALLY, you can use your pillow to support the front of the gun, in lieu of—or in addition to—a backpack.

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★
3-GUN

The Load 12 Drill

MASTER THIS REGIMEN, AND YOU WILL PLACE HIGHER IN YOUR NEXT 3-GUN MATCH
BY ALEX ROBINSON

THE GOLD-STANDARD shotgun loading drill for 3-Gun is the Load 12 drill, which was made YouTube famous by professional shooter Keith Garcia in 2012. (Garcia can complete this drill in under 10 seconds.)

It doesn't matter which loading technique you use, as long as you're pushing yourself to go as fast as you can. You can do the quad load or the load-two techniques, from either the strong or weak side. All are viable options. Here's how the drill works.

Set up six targets at a comfortable distance—about 10 yards or so. Start with two shells in the gun. You must hit all six targets.



- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1. CLOCK | 5. PLACE A |
| STARTS. FIRE | SHOT ON |
| ONE SHOT ON | TARGETS 4 |
| TARGET 1. | AND 5. |
| 2. LOAD FOUR | 6. LOAD FOUR |
| SHELLS. | SHELLS. |
| 3. PLACE A | 7. PLACE |
| SHOT ON TAR- | ONE SHOT ON |
| GETS 2 AND 3. | TARGET |
| 4. LOAD FOUR | 6. CLOCK |
| SHELLS. | STOPS. |

This is better than simply practicing loading, because it forces you to actually fire the gun and move it from shooting position to loading position. It not only tests your ability, but also how well your gear operates in a live-fire situation.

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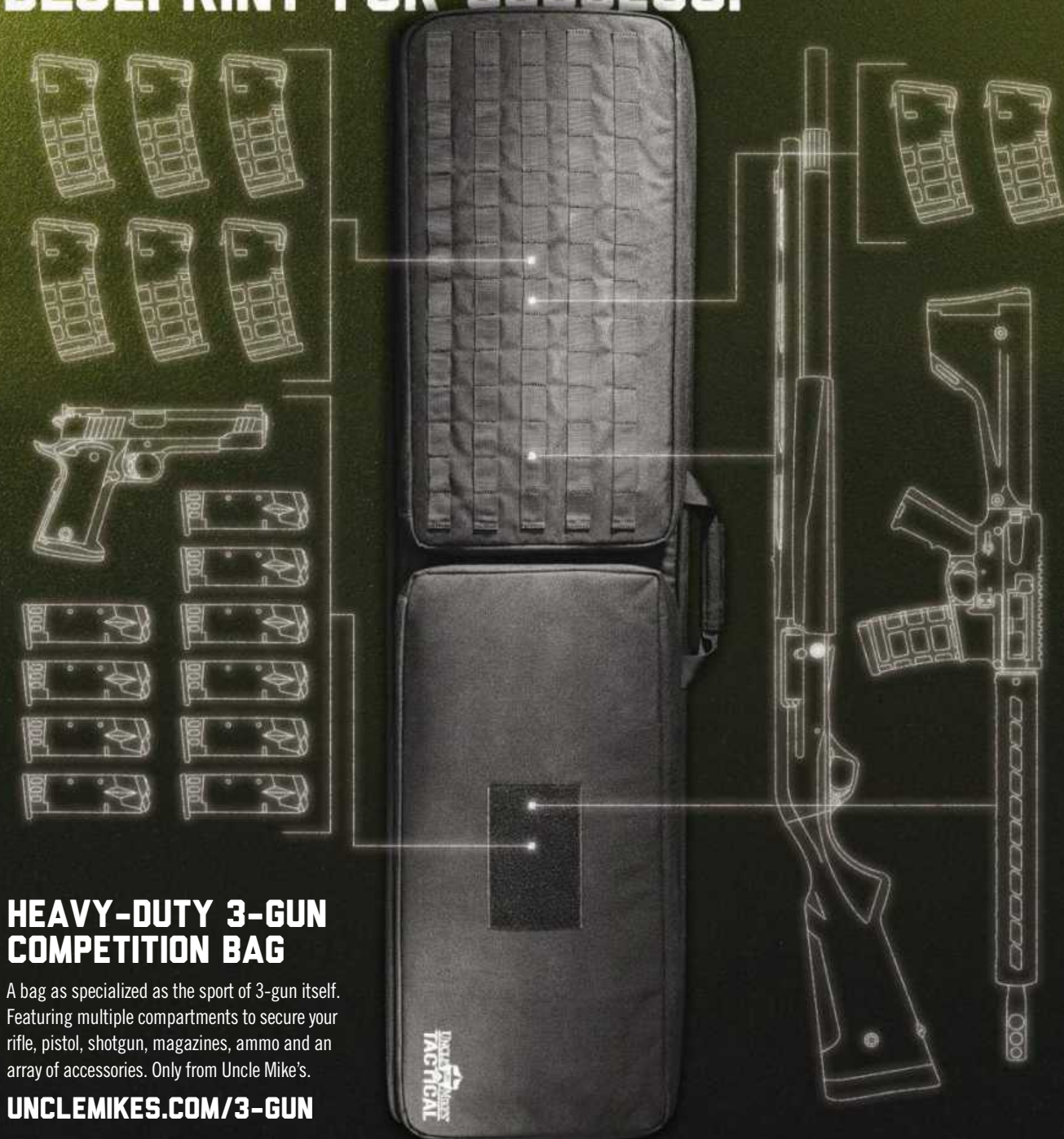


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SIG MPX-P

A FUN AND INNOVATIVE SEMI-AUTO SUBGUN BY YAMIL SUED

As a longtime fan of the venerable HK MP5 submachine gun, I was thrilled when Sig announced the MPX submachine gun platform. My first impression of the MPX was very positive; I could see that the designers at Sig fused the classic HK MP5

functionality with an AR-15 to come up with what I would call a version of the MP5 for the 21st century.

Even though there have been 9mm submachine gun versions of the AR-15, they are just full-size AR-15 receivers that have been retrofitted to accept 9mm magazines,

9mm bolt carriers, hammers, and buffers, along with a 9mm barrel. The Sig MPX has been designed from the ground up as a modular 9mm submachine gun, with the various models sharing one common lower receiver with various handguards, stocks, and barrels to complete the system.

► SPECS

Caliber 9mm

Action type Semi-auto

Operating system Closed, fully locked short-stroke push-rod gas system

Forend Aluminum mono rail

Weight w/o magazine 5 lb.

Overall length 16.85 in.

Barrel length 8 in.

Twist rate 1 in 10 in.

Trigger weight 7.6 lb.

Price: \$1,576

The Sig MPX-P pairs well with the Aimpoint T2 red-dot sight for fast, accurate shooting.



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ACCESSORIES AND OPTIONS FOR THE SIG MPX PLATFORM



A2 FLASH HIDER

The proven A2-style flash hider comes standard on the Sig MPX pistol.



MICRO FLASH CAN

Another option to reduce muzzle flash is Guntec USA's Micro Flash Can.



ANGLED GRIP

This aluminum angle grip from Guntec USA includes a useful hand stop.



STOCK ADAPTER

This Guntec USA adapter allows you to attach a brace to the Sig MPX pistol.

LIKE AN AR, BUT DIFFERENT

► The MPX disassembles almost the same way as an AR-15, with a two-pin system that separates the upper and lower receivers. The firing mechanism is also the same as the AR-15's, but it is specifically designed for the 9mm caliber.

The MPX features an ambidextrous thumb safety similar to that of the AR-15 platform, and the magazine release and bolt stop are also like the AR-15 in function and appearance. They are ambidextrous too, with the exception of the bolt release. While the shooter can release the bolt from both sides of the MPX, he can only lock the bolt back from the left side of the firearm.

The charging handle is almost identical to its AR-15 counterpart but is smaller in size. The bolt carrier system is also similar to the AR-15's system. But unlike the direct impingement design on the

AR-15, the MPX uses direct blow-back to cycle the firearm.

One major difference is the recoil spring system. On the Sig MPX it's a double-spring assembly captured on two individual guide rods. This modular system makes the MPX simple to disassemble for quick cleaning and maintenance.

The grip on the MPX is virtually identical to that of the AR-15 and can actually be interchanged with AR grips with little effort. The handguard system is also modular and machined from aluminum, and it's streamlined and narrow, which I found quite appealing.

To install accessories, the MPX comes with three 2-inch rails that attach to the handguard.

SEMI-AUTO PISTOL

► We tested the MPX-P, the semi-automatic pistol member of the MPX family. It has an 8-inch barrel with an A2-style flash hider. A

very useful hand stop is included to prevent the shooter from putting a hand near the muzzle. The hand stop can be repositioned or removed as desired.

This version doesn't have the tube and arm brace like the MPX-PSB does. It ships with a bungee-style single-point sling to improve stability and accuracy while firing. The MPX-P ships with a 30-round steel-lip magazine manufactured by Lancer, but 10- and 20-round mags are also available.

DECKING IT OUT

► Even though this pistol is new, aftermarket parts are already available. Guntec USA makes a stock adapter for the Sig SB15 brace, an aluminum angle grip, and a micro flash can, which functions as a flash hider. The aluminum angle grip, which is comfortable and ergonomic, also includes the useful hand stop.

We took the MPX-P to the range and tested it for accuracy at 10, 25, and 50 yards, using an Aimpoint Micro T2 sight. We used three kinds of ammunition: the classic Remington UMC 115-grain FMJ, ASYM Precision 147-grain FMJ, and reloads with Rainier Ballistics 124-grain TMJ bullets. We shot 5-round groups from the three distances, and our results were fairly consistent from distance to distance. The ASYM Precision Ammunition edged out the Remington, and both did better than the reloads. We also chronographed the three loads as part of the comparison.

This production version of the MPX-P performed flawlessly. Between the sighting-in process, accuracy testing, and rapid-fire reliability testing, it didn't fail once. Feeding, firing, extracting, and ejecting were flawless. Better yet, the gun is fun and accurate. Sig has a winner on its hands.

ACCURACY

AMMUNITION	10 YD.	25 YD.	50 YD.
115-GR. REMINGTON FMJ	.95 IN.	1.6 IN.	4.6 IN.
147-GR. ASYM PRECISION FMJ	.75 IN.	1.3 IN.	4.75 IN.
124-GR. RAINIER TMJ RELOADS	1.15 IN.	2.65 IN.	6.5 IN.
147-GR. RAINIER TMJ RELOADS	N/A	N/A	N/A

CHRONOGRAPH RESULTS

AMMUNITION	MUZZLE VELOCITY (FPS)	POWER FACTOR
115-GR. REMINGTON FMJ	1168	143.32
147-GR. ASYM PRECISION FMJ	897	131.91
124-GR. RAINIER TMJ RELOADS	1115	138.26
147-GR. RAINIER TMJ RELOADS	969	142.46



The cylinder locks in three places in the frame on GP-100 revolvers: at the front, bottom, and rear.

RUGER GP-100 MATCH CHAMPION

WE MIGHT LIVE IN THE ERA OF THE SEMI-AUTO, BUT REVOLVERS STILL HOLD THEIR OWN **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

T

The Match Champion is a slicked-up GP-100 that is built to be ready for competition out of the box.

With racy lines, a reduced weight, and some well-thought-out add-ons, it has the air of an aficionado's wheel gun. Ruger went to some lengths to enhance its ergonomics, starting with the Hogue hardwood grips.

The sinuous lines of the grips feel as good to hold as they look. The contours fit well in my hand, allowing for positive control without unnecessary bulk. The smooth edges on the grips prevented the gun from biting under recoil, making it comfortable to shoot, while the stippled laser-cut texturing gave enough purchase to keep the revolver from getting loose, even when I was shooting good shot-to-shot splits on steel.

MASTER THE TRIGGER

► The trigger pull on my sample was not as light as those on some of my tuned revolvers, but it had a smooth and consistent pull, and with a little dry-fire practice and range time, I found it easy to achieve good shot-to-shot splits on steel.

As with any double-action revolver, trigger control is one of the keys to fast, accurate shooting, and you do this by pre-loading the trigger prior to the sights settling on whatever target you're shooting at.

In essence, you want to start your trigger pull as you extend the revolver toward the target for the first shot, timing it so the trigger is ready to break with very little additional pressure as the sights align on what you're aiming at.

This same principal applies with follow-up shots. You want to start the trigger moving for a follow-up shot the moment the revolver moves under recoil, so that by the time the front sight moves back on to the target, you're ready to shoot again.

BUILT FOR SPEED

► The Match Champion is available with two types of sights: fixed and adjustable. I opted for the fixed low-profile Novak sights. The large, round fiber-optic inset in the front sight draws your attention like a lighthouse beacon on a foggy night, another boon to fast shooting.

The barrel length—4.2 inches—is also helpful for putting lead downrange in a

hurry. It gives the gun good balance and pointability without adding extra weight and material. In keeping with this "just right" vibe, the slab-sided barrel is machined with a half-lug profile that encases the ejector rod.

I spent a lot of time with the revolver, shooting mostly bargain-priced .38 S&W loads, which was a smart move, as pulling the trigger on it is addictive.

For action shooting, the accuracy is more than adequate. Even smaller steel targets at extended ranges—25 yards and more—are within its capabilities.

Most important, the gun is just fun to shoot.

As with other GP-100s, the Match Champion is durable and built to withstand abuse. Should the need arise, it is easy to take down and service without special tools.

The Match Champion has an MSRP of \$929, but the real-world price is closer to \$700, making it a good value.

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SHOOTING

SMALL-GAME GUNS

RABBIT ARSENAL

+ With winter upon us, now is a good time to downsize your hunting and go after small game. There are many great guns to choose from, but the following are among my favorites. **BY TYLER FREEL**

TIP

Don't hunt with a trigger set to less than 3 pounds in cold conditions. Numb fingers and light triggers are a recipe for a negligent discharge.



Small game can give you challenges and memories as special as any giant buck. But the variety of guns to choose from is even more extensive than the animals there are to hunt.



AIM SMALL, MISS SMALL

It's a given that with small game, you'll have a small target. You won't have much room for error if you're looking to salvage meat, so head shots are your best bet. Practice shooting, but forget the bench. Work on offhand and kneeling shots, and using improvised rests such as trees or fence posts.

Fundamentals are key, and the more you practice repeating a good shot sequence from each position, the better your shooting will become. Shoot groups from each position and save your targets so you can track your progress over time.

Headed home with a brace of snowshoe hares taken with a shotgun.

RIFLES If there's a must-have gun for every hunter, it's a good small-game rifle. Of course, the first thing that comes to mind is a good .22 LR. The "ol' two-two" has no doubt been more hunters' first firearm than

anything else, and options range from dusty antiques to slick tactical guns, with just about any action or configuration you could ever want.

Although the .22 LR adequately covers

the gamut of small game, it's also worth talking about the .17 HMR and .17 Hornet. Both are awesome cartridges that can do everything the .22 can, but faster, farther, and more accurately.



A HENRY CLASSIC LEVER ACTION .22 These are quality rifles, and I get nostalgic just picking one up. It takes me back to my childhood days of stalking irrigation ditches and sagebrush for cottontails. It's a rifle that you can count on passing down to your grandchildren. (\$360; henryrifles.com)

B RUGER 10/22 TAKEDOWN It's hard to argue against the 10/22. It's earned a reputation as one of the most reliable semi-autos on the market. Loaded with CCI Stingers, it's formidable on even larger critters—I have killed a lot of coyotes with them. (\$409; ruger.com)

C SAVAGE MK II FV-SR This bolt-action .22 with a tactical twist lives up to Savage's reputation for accuracy, and it comes threaded for a suppressor. Mine wears a Liberty Regulator suppressor and, shooting subsonic Eley match ammo, is a quiet tack-driver. (\$284; savagearms.com)

D SAVAGE A-17 Savage's new hot rod has filled a huge gap for the .17 HMR. This great cartridge has needed a reliable semi-auto for years, and here it is. This is a quick-shooting, reliable, and ergonomic package. Furry critters, beware. (\$465; savagearms.com)

E CZ 527 VARMINT (.17 HORNET) Although a little hot for a standard small-game rifle, the .17 Hornet is a deadly accurate round. Whether you're knocking the heads off cottontails from 150 yards or hunting the larger end of the spectrum, like lynxes, bobcats, foxes, and coyotes, the CZ-.17 Hornet combo has you covered. Hornady's 20-grain V-Max factory loads shoot sub-MOA, and unlike rimfire rounds, the .17 Hornet can be reloaded. (\$775; cz-usa.com)

SHOTGUNS Whether you're wingshooting grouse, ptarmigan, pheasants, or other upland birds, or chasing running rabbits, no small-game arsenal is complete without a good shotgun.



A MOSSBERG 500 .410 Probably the first shotgun I ever fired was my dad's Mossberg .410. A full choke on doves will truly test your wingshooting skills, and using 3-inch shells with No. 6 shot will knock down grouse or ptarmigan. (\$330; mossberg.com)

B REMINGTON 870 20-GAUGE It's hard to discuss shotguns without bringing up the 870. Along with the Mossberg, it is one of the most time-proven and widely used shotguns out there, and it is responsible for more filled bird bags than any other shotgun. (\$417; remington.com)

C STOEGER COACH GUN There's something about the feel of a side-by-side while you're kicking up birds in the brush, but I probably will never shell out the money for a high-end one. I tend to beat the tar out of shotguns, and it won't break your heart to beat this one up. It is affordable and, in my experience, dependable. No frills, chokes, or anything fancy, but I still get a smile on my face when I fold up a flushing ruffed grouse and crack the action. (\$449; stoegerindustries.com)

HANDGUNS There may be a lot of rifles and shotguns to take care of your small-game needs, but sometimes a handgun is in order.



A RUGER SINGLE SIX CONVERTIBLE STAINLESS (.22 LR/.22 WMR) This is my main go-to handgun, whether I'm popping ptarmigan, dispatching animals on the trap line, or taking down grouse or rabbits while I'm hunting bigger critters. It's an accurate, versatile, and very dependable handgun that will last a lifetime. (\$659; ruger.com)

B BROWNING BUCK MARK CAMPER STAINLESS In a sea of lead-spraying semi-autos, the Buck Mark has been building a reputation as an accurate, dependable pistol. Most semis can't keep groups inside a coffee can at 20 yards, but the Buck Mark does. (\$429; browning.com)



WEATHERBY MARK V ACCUMARK

THIS NEW RIFLE DEBUTS THE WORLD'S FASTEST 6.5MM CARTRIDGE **BY JOHN B. SNOW**

There's fast. There's faster. Then there's the 6.5-300 Weatherby Magnum. This speed-demon is Weatherby's first new cartridge in decades, and to showcase the round, the company has built a new rifle to go with it—the revamped Mark V Accumark.

Based on a necked-down .300 Weatherby Magnum, the 6.5-300 Weatherby has the profile of a mini ICBM and is now the fastest commercial 6.5mm cartridge available. The round has generated considerable chatter among shooters since it was announced last fall, with equal portions of praise and damnation being heaped upon it—before anybody had a chance to actually shoot it, naturally.

Lost in the initial buzz was any comment on the changes to the Mark V Accumark, which represents the first significant alteration to this iconic long gun since it was introduced back in 1958.

Hot-Rod Rifle

Roy Weatherby made his mark by designing cartridges that were fast and building rifles for them that were accurate and flashy. His rifles had bling and swagger at a time when the round receiver of a Remington 700 was enough to raise eyebrows for its outré design. His Hollywood aesthetic, and sense of showmanship, echoed the hot-rod car culture that also flourished in Southern California in the 1950s.

This new Accumark is a direct descendant of Roy's early creations. The highly polished stainless-steel barrel and bolt are offset with matte black in the fluting and around the recessed crown in the muzzle.

Its shine and gloss will make some hunters complain that it might alert sharp-eyed game while stalking, but like the cartridge, this rifle is making a statement that it will not be ignored.

As I mentioned, there has also been much grumbling about the cartridge, which is admittedly an over-bored sonofabitch, for being a barrel burner that doesn't have a "point." To which I say, get over it. To extend the car metaphor, it's like a gaggle of Prius owners tsk-tsking muscle car enthusiasts. "Do they have any idea how much fuel they waste?" Go home, Mildred.

You don't get a rifle that pushes a 127-grain Barnes LRX at 3,531 fps because you're concerned about barrel life. You get it because you like bullets that haul ass and shoot flat.

And shoot flat it does. Sighted in 2 inches high at 100 yards, the Barnes LRX is dead-on at 294 yards.

By the time the bullet has travelled 400 yards, it has dropped only 7.5 inches, is booking along at 2,650 fps, and retains 1,980 foot-pounds of energy. It will take game at extended ranges and will make for an excellent predator round. With monolithic bullets, the 6.5-300 will easily crumple elk, moose, and other large critters.

► STATS

Caliber: 6.5-300 Wby.

Capacity: 3+1

Weight: 8 lb. 3 oz.

Trigger Pull: 2 lb. 15 oz.

Accuracy: 1.229 in.

Smallest Group: 922 in.

Barrel Length: 26 in.

Overall Length: 38¼–41⅝ in.

Price: \$2,300

Contact: weatherby.com

PERFORMANCE

Handling	Reliability	Accuracy	Meets Purpose	Versatility
9	9	8	10	8

DESIGN

Craftsmanship	Ergonomics	Durability	Aesthetics
9	9	8	10

VALUE

7

TOTAL

87

The Accumark retains the Mark V's 9-lug bolt and short 56-degree bolt throw.



Better Ergonomics

The shine and gloss is one thing, but the changes to the rifle extend beyond the cosmetic. The stock, for instance, has a geometry that is completely different from previous versions of the Mark V, and I found it quite pleasing to shoot.

Weatherby has narrowed the forend and given the grip a sharper radius and a noticeable palm swell. The sharp radius allows the shooter to pull the rifle into his shoulder more easily, while the palm swell and raised cheekpiece create solid points of contact with the trigger hand and face, respectively. Together, these features give improved control over the gun.

And that helps with a rifle as large as the Mark V Accumark. With its magnum-length action and 26-inch barrel, it is substantial, weighing 8 pounds 3 ounces unscoped and empty. This control also helps handle the recoil of the 6.5-300, which I found very manageable—more than I would have guessed—during my evaluation.

Another tweak to the rifle is the LXX trigger, which is new and of Weatherby's own design. It is adjustable down to 2½ pounds, but mine came to me set at 2 pounds 15 ounces, which is ideal for a hunting rifle, so I didn't fool with it. The trigger has a slight amount of take-up that, when engaged, required only a few extra ounces of pressure to break. With a little bit of dry-fire practice to get used to it, I found the trigger offered excellent control.

All Mark V barrels will now be hand-lapped as well, says Weatherby, which should help with accuracy. In addition to the Accumark, the 6.5-300 will be offered in an Accumark RC (for Range Certified, meaning it has been shot at the factory and comes with a target guaranteeing sub-MOA performance) and in an Ultra Lightweight model. The barrels on all three are 26 inches long with 1-in-8-inch twists, though the Ultra Lightweight comes with a 2-inch muzzle brake attached, bringing its length to a long 28 inches.

In the Field

Accuracy with the rifle was quite good. I shot all three factory loads Weatherby is offering. The 127-grain Barnes LRX load did the best, turning in sub-MOA 5-shot groups, averaging .935 inches. (Like that

NOTABLE FEATURES



+ Changes to the stock design on the Weatherby Mark V, such as the noticeable palm swell on the grip, have improved the rifle's handling while trimming a little bit of weight. Weatherby will be offering the stocks in both right- and left-handed configurations.



+ Weatherby is initially offering three factory loads: the 127-grain Barnes LRX at 3,531 fps (pictured); the 130-grain Swift Scirocco at 3,475 fps; and the 140-grain Swift A-Frame at 3,395 fps. All are good hunting bullets, and at these velocities are as flat-shooting as you could hope for.

of most other gun companies, Weatherby's accuracy guarantee is based on more forgiving 3-shot groups.) The 140-grain Swift A-Frames average group size was 1.174 inches, while the 130-grain Scirocco's were 1.550 inches. Given that the ammo is not cheap (\$95 for a box of 20), handloading the 6.5-300 is worth considering, especially in light of the plethora of great long and sleek 6.5mm bullets out there to experiment with. Yes, it will burn great handfuls of powder, and go through expensive brass at a brisk rate. But beyond its utility—or lack thereof—this new cartridge is pure Weatherby. Its speed and eye-popping ballistics are in keeping with the company's DNA. From his perch in the gamefields on high, I'm sure Roy Weatherby is smiling.

2015

1919

THEN AND NOW THE WINCHESTER '94

A LOOK AT 120 YEARS OF THE BEST-SELLING SPORTING RIFLE IN AMERICAN HISTORY
BY ARAM VON BENEDIKT

I strolled along, reluctantly following my wife into the house with the “Yard Sale” sign out front. Though she and my kids were brimming with excitement about treasures they might find hidden in the dark recesses of the century-old home, I was doubtful that it held anything capable of rousing my pulse.

Wandering into a back bedroom, I went on point tighter than a quail dog. Leaning in a corner was an old Winchester '94 carbine—as trail-worn and tough looking as John Wayne in *The Cowboys*.

Twenty minutes later I was headed out the door with the old '94 and a grin that lasted at least

three days. I researched the lovely beat-up old lever-action: It was a saddle-ring model in .25/35, bluing all but worn away, and the air of a veteran about it. Sporting a serial number below one million, the rifle was manufactured in 1919. Almost a century later, this old rifle still shoots true and functions smoothly and reliably.

Winchester lever-actions in various models ('73, '86, '92) deservedly earned the moniker *The Gun That Won the West*. Arriving somewhat late on the scene, the '94 is praised as “the ultimate lever-action design,” and is the last and greatest of a long legacy of rifles designed when lever-actions carried more authority than the law.



The author putting lead downrange with the new '94 while shooting offhand.

HISTORY

► **1894:** Designed by John M. Browning, the '94 was originally chambered for the .32/40 and .38/55 metallic black powder cartridges.

► **1895:** Winchester improved its metalurgy, enabling the '94 to become the first commercially available American sporting rifle chambered in smokeless-powder rounds: the .30 WCF (Winchester Center Fire, which became known as the .30/30), and the .25/35. With more than 7,000,000 sold, the '94 still holds the distinction of being the best-selling high-powered sporting rifle in U.S. history.

► **1964:** Winchester made changes to its manufacturing process, intending to expedite production and increase profits. The results were disastrous. Reduction in quality caused a universal outcry among Winchester aficionados. To this day, earlier rifles—generally referred to as “pre-’64” models—command a premium price over post-change rifles.

► **1982:** Winchester improved (by modern standards) its cartridge ejection port to toss cartridges to the side rather than up, allowing a scope to be mounted atop the firearm.

THEN & NOW

Curious to examine the differences between my old original '94 and the new models available on the market today, I requested a comparable rifle from Winchester. They obligingly sent me a brand-new Trails End model (a carbine-length firearm featuring Winchester's rugged takedown system). It's not an exact reproduction of my old rifle, but it's close enough for accurate comparison. Winchester is not currently producing '94s in .25/35, so I opted for a test rifle in .30/30.

I compared, handled, and fired the two rifles side-by-side. Here are the results.

SPECIFICATIONS	ORIGINAL WIN. 1894 (CIRCA 1919)	TRAILS END WIN. 1894 (CIRCA 2015)
CALIBER	.25/35	.30/30
CAPACITY	6	6
BARREL LENGTH	20	20
STOCK	WALNUT	WALNUT
FINISH: WOOD	REFINISHED, GLOSS	SATIN
FINISH: METAL	BLUED (98% WORN AWAY)	BLUED
BUTT PLATE	CRESCENT, STEEL	SHOTGUN, PLASTIC
SIGHTS	BEAD FRONT	BEAD FRONT
FOREND CAP	NONE	BLUED STEEL
SADDLE RING	STEEL (REMOVED)	NONE
SAFETY	NONE	TANG
EJECTION	TOP	TOP (BUT TOSSES BRASS TO THE SIDE)
SCOPE/OPTIC	NO	YES
HALF COCK NOTCH	YES	NO (REBOUNDED HAMMER)
ACCURACY*	1.69 (WIN. 117-GR. SP)	1.64 (150-GR. POWER POINT)
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	USA	JAPAN

*AVG. OF THREE 3-SHOT GROUPS AT 50 YARDS

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GUNS: Miller used 30 CZ semi-auto 712 and 912 shotguns. Fitted with Nordic Components magazine extensions, the shotguns held 16 rounds apiece. Miller installed leather straps on the guns for a better grip.



AMMO: Miller had 5,000 rounds of Federal's Gold Medal Handicap Trap, a 2¾-inch shell with 1⅞ ounces of shot. This is not a light load, especially if you are going to shoot more than 4,000 rounds in one evening.

HOW TO SET A WORLD RECORD

DAVID MILLER BROKE 3,653 CLAYS IN ONE HOUR. HERE'S HOW HE DID IT **BY LARRY CASE**

I shoot shotguns and you shoot shotguns, but none of us shoots shotguns like David Miller. Miller is a master-class sporting clays competitor from Grain Valley, Missouri, and the shotgun product manager and exhibition shooter for CZ-USA. He is absolutely rabid about shotguns and shooting. If Miller were a bird dog, you'd want one of his pups.

A little over one year ago, Miller was watching TV with his girlfriend, Kelley Lindley, and her son, Will, and daughter, Sydney. It was a program about people trying to set new world records. Will told Miller that he should attempt some world record with a shotgun. Miller came up with the idea to break more clays in the span of an hour than anyone had previously done. Soon, he was involved in a laborious process working with Guinness World Records and the National Sporting Clays Association to construct an event that took place last May.



GLOVES: Miller wore padded shooting gloves because his hands and fingers had taken a beating during practice sessions. His fingers were wrapped in tape prior to putting on the gloves.

THE SETUP

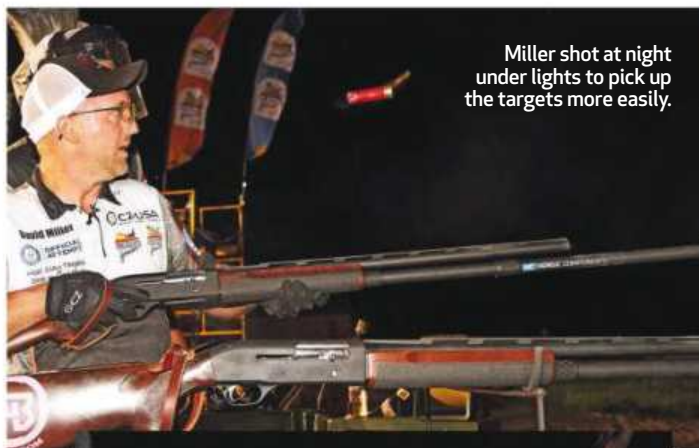
Miller shot four practice sessions before the event. As you might imagine, several kinks had to be worked out. The target throwers and the rate at which they launched the clays were a major concern. Too fast and Dave could not focus on the target he was shooting, too slow and there would not be enough time to get all of them broken in one hour. The speed had to be just right. The rate of fire during the attempt was around one shot every three-fifths of a second, so a target was being thrown about every half second.

Once the target machines started throwing clays, they ran continuously. Miller would shoot a shotgun empty and drop it on a padded surface and then reach to his right, pick up a loaded one and start over. Sixteen rounds, drop, pick up, start firing, *boom, boom, boom*.

The one time I ventured onto the platform next to where Miller was shooting, the scene was somewhat bizarre. Smoke and empties filled the air; Miller had a determined but agonized look on his face, like a guy that had been running in a marathon too long. The shotgun seemed to be firing at a ridiculous speed, but the clays were dissolving one by one. Empty, drop, pick up, *boom, boom, boom*.

Miller shot the event at night under lights. He felt the black background created more contrast and helped him see the targets better. During the shoot, thunder and lightning storms swirled around the Harrisonville-area Heartland Trap & Skeet gun range, creating a surreal atmosphere.

When the time was up and the horn blew, Miller had fired 4,402 shotgun shells and hit 3,653 clay targets in one hour. That's an 83 percent hit ratio, something most of us would be happy with at our local skeet range on a Sunday afternoon. Miller set the new Guinness World Record for the most clay targets broken in one hour with a shotgun. I personally don't expect it to be broken anytime soon, but if Miller gets reincarnated as a springer spaniel or an English pointer, you'd better get one of those pups.



Miller shot at night under lights to pick up the targets more easily.



TARGET THROWERS: Sixteen Mec Clay Target Machines powered the event. They threw 5,265 clays and performed flawlessly.



TARGETS: There were 6,400 White Flyer Standard Trap and Skeet Targets at the event. They were 108 mm in diameter and orange on both sides.



GUN BEARERS: Miller had 30 helpers that did nothing but load and carry the shotguns to and from the platform that he shot from. This became a rotating line during the hour of shooting, with the assistants carrying shotguns with magazines longer than the barrels.

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THE DANGEROUS-GAME TRIO

THREE RIFLES THAT WILL WORK ON ANY GAME, ANYWHERE. WHETHER YOUR QUARRY SPORTS FANGS, TUSKS, OR CLAWS, ONE OF THESE RIFLES WILL HELP YOU PREVAIL AND LIVE TO TELL THE TALE **BY BRAD FITZPATRICK**

MONTANA RIFLE COMPANY DANGEROUS GAME RIFLE

► The DGR employs Montana Rifle's double square bridge Mauser action, designed and built in its Kalispell factory. Integral dovetail mounts are machined into the receiver, and the over-size bolt makes it easy to operate the action quickly. The action is bedded, and dual cross bolts prevent powerful cartridges from splitting the walnut stock. The sights are sturdy and effective, and adjustable for both windage and elevation. There is nothing particularly fancy about the look of this rifle, but it's ultra-reliable and extremely accurate. It is available in .338 Lapua, .378 Wby. Mag., .416 Rigby, .460 Wby. Mag., and .505 Gibbs, and in the rarefied world of purpose-built dangerous-game guns, it is an affordable option. (\$2,299; montanarifleco.com)

CZ-USA AMERICAN SAFARI MAGNUM

► Based on CZ's stout 550 Mauser-style magnum action, the American Safari rifle comes with express sights with two folding leaves, a two-position safety, and a single-set trigger. The oversized magazine well allows for increased capacity, and like the DGR, the American Safari has dovetail scope mounts machined directly into the receiver for maximum strength and reliability. Dual crossbolts in the Turkish walnut stock help secure the action. It is chambered in .375 H&H Magnum, .416 Rigby, .458 Win. Mag., and .458 Lott. (From \$1,215; cz-usa.com)

RIGBY BIG GAME RIFLE

► Rigby is back in London, and the company is once again producing some of the best bolt-action dangerous-game guns. Mauser supplies the actions, and you can choose between a single square bridge version chambered in either .416 or .450 Rigby or a double square bridge, machined to accept optic mounts, in either .375 H&H Magnum or .416 Rigby. Considering the price, this isn't a rifle for everyone, but considering you get your name in the company's ledger, which dates back to the 1700s, this is a tempting dangerous-game entry. (From \$13,558; johnrigbyandco.com)

FEDERAL PREMIUM SAFARI CAPE-SHOK WOODLEIGH HYDRO SOLID

Traditionally, solid bullets have been designed for straight, deep penetration, an important factor when hunting heavy game. Traditional solids, though, generate less hydrostatic shock than expanding bullets and create small wound channels. Federal's new Safari ammunition loaded with Woodleigh Hydro Solids was designed to penetrate while generating significant shock. A cavitation ring in the nose of the bullet "cores" through the target and creates a pressure ring that allows the bullet to penetrate while generating a wider wound channel and increasing shock. (From \$120; federalpremium.com)



How a Chicago Doctor Shook Up the Hearing Aid Industry with his Newest Invention

New nearly invisible digital hearing aid breaks price barrier in affordability

Reported by J. Page

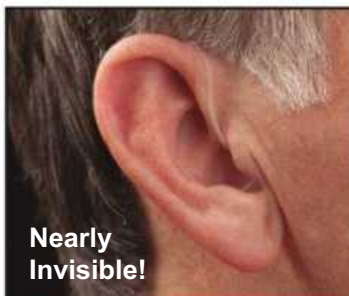
Chicago: Board-certified Ear, Nose, and Throat physician Dr. S. Cherukuri has done it once again with his newest invention of a medical-grade, ALL-DIGITAL affordable hearing aid.

This new digital hearing aid is packed with all the features of \$3,500 competitors at a mere fraction of the cost. **Now, most people with hearing loss are able to enjoy crystal clear, natural sound—in a crowd, on the phone, in the wind—without suffering through “whistling” and annoying background noise.**

Digital Hearing Aid Outperforms Expensive Competitors

This sleek, fully programmed, light-weight, hearing aid is the outgrowth of the digital revolution that is changing our world. While demand for “all things digital” caused most prices to plunge (consider DVD players and computers, which originally sold for thousands of dollars and today can be purchased for less), the cost of a digital medical-grade hearing aid remains out of reach.

Dr. Cherukuri knew that many of his patients would benefit but couldn't afford the expense for these new digital hearing aids. Generally they are *not* covered by Medicare and most private health insurance plans.



Nearly Invisible!

SAME FEATURES AS EXPENSIVE HEARING AID COMPETITORS

- ✓ **Mini Behind-the-Ear hearing aid with thin tubing for a nearly invisible appearance**
- ✓ **Advanced Noise Reduction to make speech clearer**
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- ✓ **Wide Dynamic Range Compression makes soft sounds audible and loud sounds comfortable**
- ✓ **Telecoil setting for use with compatible phones, and looped environments like churches**
- ✓ **3 Programs and Volume Dial accommodate most common types of hearing loss even in challenging listening environments**

The doctor evaluated the high-priced digital hearing aids on the market, broke them down to their base components, and then created his own affordable version — called the MDHearingAid *AIR* for its virtually invisible, lightweight appearance.

Affordable Digital Technology

Using advanced digital technology, the MDHearingAid *AIR* automatically adjusts to your listening environment — prioritizing speech and de-emphasizing background noise. Experience all of the sounds you've been missing at a price you can afford. This doctor designed and approved hearing aid comes with a full year's supply of long-life batteries. It delivers crisp, clear sound all day long and the soft flexible ear domes are so comfortable you won't realize you're wearing them.

Try it Yourself at Home 45-Day Risk-Free Trial

Of course, hearing is believing and we invite you to try it for yourself with our RISK-FREE 45-Day home trial. If you are not completely satisfied, simply return it within that time period for a full refund of your purchase price.

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Can a hearing aid delay or prevent dementia?

A study by Johns Hopkins and the National Institute on Aging suggests older individuals with hearing loss are significantly more likely to develop dementia over time than those who retain their hearing. They suggest that an intervention—such as a hearing aid—could delay or prevent dementia by improving hearing!

“Satisfied Buyers Agree AIR is the Best Digital Value!”

“I am hearing things I didn't know I was missing. Really amazing. I'm wearing them all the time” —Linda I., Indiana

“Almost work too well. I am a teacher and hearing much better now” —Lillian B., California

“I have used many expensive hearing aids, some over \$5,000. The AIRs have greatly improved my enjoyment of life” —Som Y., Michigan

“I would definitely recommend them to my patients with hearing loss” —Amy S., Audiologist, Indiana



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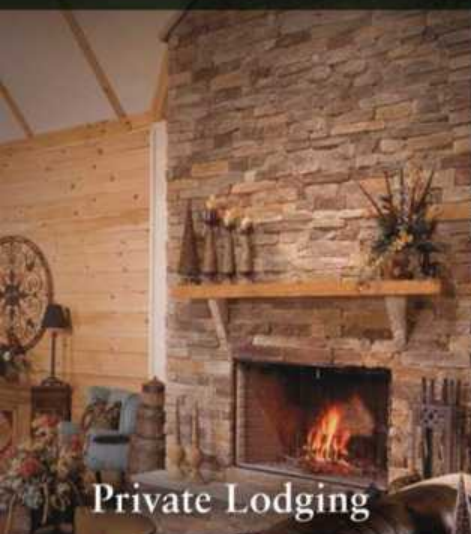




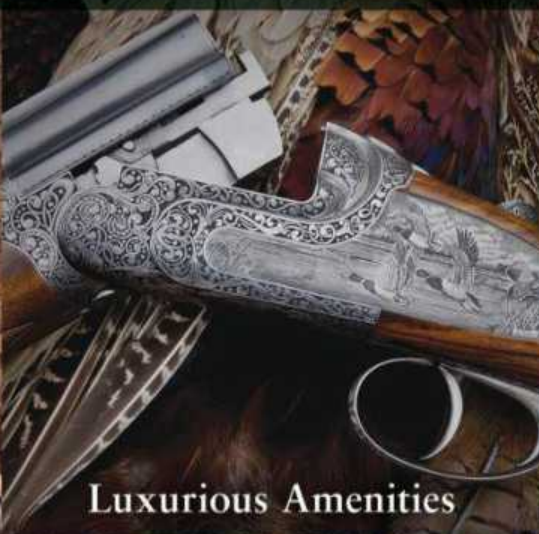
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FISHING

Clam Ice Team member Kelly Granrud with a fat Minnesota crappie.

PANFISH

THE NEW ICE AGE

+ Save the wintertime barbecue for the amateurs. The new breed of icefisherman is all about catching a bunch of fish.
BY DAVID A. BROWN

TIP

To prevent ice from building up in your jigging rod guides, spray some silicone on a clean cloth and pull it through each eye.

P

Peacock bass in the Amazon, giant largemouths from Mexico's bass factories, massive pike wrested from the icy waters of Canada's northernmost reaches—I've enjoyed plenty of angling adventures. None, though, have intrigued me more than pulling panfish through a hole in the ice. Go figure. I'm amazed myself.

Recent winter forays to Minnesota's Leech Lake and other Ice Belt "hot" spots have captivated my analytical mind like little else. The ultra-detailed strategies and technological advancements that drive today's icefishing scene have turned what was once an excuse to have a winter-time beer-and-brat cook-out with a bunch of fishing buddies into a serious cold-weather pursuit.

To frame this, *Grumpy Old Men* was to icefishing what *Jaws* was to pretty much every shark swimming—loose with the facts and rough on the PR. Camping over one or two ice holes—maybe inside a tricked-out permanent shelter—leans more toward the sport's fraternal side, but it's a far cry from how modern, mission-directed ice anglers go about the business of catching fish.

THE TARGET ZONES

■ We can break down the winter pursuit of bluegills, crappies, pumpkinseed, and yellow perch to just a few key components. Remember, to catch fish consistently, you need to adjust to conditions and fish behavior.

Local specifics vary from lake to lake, but Iowa's Kevan Paul says you can't go wrong by targeting weed beds—especially those crisp-green patches that pump out oxygen and fuel the food chain of aquatic insects and microorganisms. But how do you go about finding weed beds under a foot of ice?

"From the macro view, shallow bays will always be the most likely

weed areas," says Paul. "But it's also a good idea to network with locals (including bait-shop owners and fisheries biologists) to get dialed in."

North Dakota guide Jason Mitchell is careful to note the water color that spouts from a drilled hole. Clean water means weed growth, while stained water generally means a dark, muddy bottom.

On the ice, Paul starts in about 7 feet of water and drills a line of test holes all the way to the bank (noting ice thickness for safety). Then, using a flasher or underwater camera, he'll slide over about 30 feet and drill another line of holes in order to develop a grid

that will eventually tell him where the weeds are located. Then he'll either rotate through the playing field and jig on one and use tip-ups to signal strikes on others.

"The first thing I do is find out where the weed line is in the lake," says icefishing legend Dave Genz. "If it's 8 feet or less, I usually look for fish in deeper water, because those weeds usually fall down in the summertime. If it's 10 feet or more, then I'll look for standing green weeds when first ice comes."

At mid-season, most lakes see a mass migration of fish from weed beds to deeper water where bluegills, sunfish, and perch feast on emerging blood



worms, which are the larvae of a non-biting midge, while crappies suspend around schools of minnows, shad, and shiners.

Late ice finds the pattern reversing, as many of those deep fish return to the warming shallows. Here, the first stage of melting ice and snow sends freshly oxygenated water and any forage it gathers through all those early-season holes and naturally occurring cracks. This, along with new bug hatches spurred by increasing light levels, fosters a major late-ice feed.

Lake maps can point you to contour breaks, humps, and holes. Genz points out that wherever you fish, early morning and

evening have high potential, as panfish capitalize on the low-light spike in zooplankton activity. At any hour, keep your shadow off the hole and minimize the noise you make, as it can reverberate through ice and water.

PINPOINT THE BITE

Whereas blind drops may catch fish, knowing your depth, habitat, and fish positioning will make you more efficient. Some like the video-game look of a high-def portable fishfinder, but Paul says flashers offer a superior perspective.

"You have quicker response on a flasher, and your target ID and fish separation is going to be

much better," he says. You're able to separate your jig from the fish down to about ½ inch, so when that fish is coming up, you know when it's ½ inch away. On a fish finder, when the fish comes to within a couple of inches of your jig, you're going to see a blob."

Another benefit to using a flasher, adds Paul, is that you can adjust cadence. He'll use varying levels of active jigging to attract fish, but when his flasher shows one sniffing, he'll slow the bait to a nervous quiver.

"The flasher's definition will also show you the biggest fish in the school," he says. "That allows you to fly past the little fish and target the bigger ones."



Fish on! Shelly Holland (left) works a bluegill to the surface. Mousie-tipped jigs are her preferred offering.

SIMPLE SAFETY

For this Floridian, standing on a frozen lake took some getting used to, but my last late-ice trip saw a comforting 3 feet of rigid frigid. Throughout the season, the Minnesota DNR defines ice safety with this scale:

2 INCHES OR LESS:

STAY OFF

4 INCHES: Icefishing or other activities on foot

5 INCHES: Snowmobile or ATV

8-12 INCHES: Car or small pickup

13-15 INCHES: Medium truck

Back up these guidelines with safety equipment:

ICE CLEATS: Rubber frames with metal spike pads snug to your sole and prevent slipping.

ICE CHISEL: Test the ice ahead of you with this sturdy staff that also helps steady your steps.

PEP: A wise option for the sketchy periods of early and late ice. Always a smart precaution for kids.

THROW ROPE: If the unthinkable occurs, tossing a lifeline from a safe distance prevents a double emergency.

NEOLUS: This compact device deploys and inflates a life raft that keeps your snowmobile from sinking and you out of numbing water.





▶ Most serious fishermen complement flashers with an underwater camera to inspect habitat and gauge specific fish response to bait depth, size, color, and action. Combo units like Vexilar's Fish Scout Double Vision Pack marry the two views, while handheld models like Aqua Vu's AV Micro 5 allow anglers optimal mobility for hole-hopping.

FEED 'EM RIGHT

Fan casting is a preferred search tactic anglers sacrifice once a lake freezes. However, there are options for attracting and engaging various panfish.

• **Shake and Flash:** In tough conditions, when fish are slow to respond, guide Jason Durham uses a rattling spoon to call in fish before switching to a jig for finesse work.

• **Aggressive Action:** Mitchell employs exaggerated jig hops until fish show on his screen. When targets move closer, he slows his presentation.

• **Hop Aboard:** When finicky bluegills, crappies, and sunfish shy away from a large hook, Durham opts for a piggyback rig. Removing the treble hook from a spoon's split ring, he replaces it with a tiny jig, thereby creating a presentation that weeds out smaller fish but still appeals to the ones he wants to catch.

Overall, plastic tails of various minnow, insect, and creature-bait forms add fish-tempting motion, while tipping with maggots helps close the deal. Color preference varies with light changes, but white and vivid colors tend to be the stimulators.

SUPER SLEDS

ANY OLD SNOWMOBILE CAN GET YOU FROM POINT A TO POINT B, BUT THESE TRICKED-OUT ICEFISHING MACHINES WILL ACTUALLY HELP YOU CATCH FISH

Pardon the pun, but there's no cooler transportation than a snowmobile—at least where icefishing is concerned. Fun aside, there's also no disputing the logistical benefits of a ride that defies winter's worst weather to carry anglers and their gear to and from the day's objectives.

A well-equipped snowmobile is both workhorse and trail mount. For most, the strategy involves using the snowmobile for big runs and then working an area on foot. From a parked machine, lightweight pop-up shelters and portable electronics are easy to carry from hole to hole.

Racing and thrill rides seldom coincide with the ice angler's need for functional efficiency, so top-end speed is probably a mid-list consideration. More important are stability, accessibility, and storage space.

A larger machine offers more room for customization, from high-tech electronics to utilitarian gear racks fore and aft. However, you can get the job done with just about any trail model. Just picture how you'll be using the snowmobile for your style of

icefishing and then equip and accessorize accordingly.

SLED SETUP

1 TOW HITCH: The ride's bumpy back there, so tow your sturdier stuff and load delicate items on the machine.

2 REAR GEAR RACK: An extra accessory tub serves to hold fish, extra traps, and other gear. An elevated position maximizes speed, as opposed to dragging a tub.

3 SEAT: Under-seat storage holds spare tackle, extra clothing, safety rope, ice cleats, etc.

4 EXTRA ROD HOLDERS: PVC pipe will suffice, but gripping surfaces (like you'd find on a broom holder) keep small rods from bouncing out while running. **OPTION:** A rod case stored on the gear rack.

5 GEAR POUCHES: Multifunctional protection for transducers and your

underwater camera lens when running. Just pull up, drill holes, and drop the heads in the hole.

6 DASH ELECTRONICS: Flasher, GPS, and an underwater camera facilitate hole hopping.

7 AUGER MOUNTS: Secure augers with bungee cords or lockable latches.

8 FRONT RACK: Extra storage is nice, but a sled's front end hits a lot of snow and slush, so avoid stowing anything fragile here.

9 TRACK: Wider is better for maximum contact over varying levels of snow and slush. You want long tracks for better contact with sketchy surfaces. You might sacrifice speed for stability to avoid bogging down. Tracks typically intake natural moisture for lubrication, but on bare ice, squirting dish soap into tracks helps prevent seizing. —D.A.B.



DAVID A. BROWN (2)

Aka poor-man's lobster, burbot are delectable when boiled and served with cocktail sauce.

On Flaming Gorge Reservoir—a 91-mile tub straddling the Wyoming-Utah border—fisheries managers hope more anglers come to icefish. Burbot numbers exploded here after someone illegally introduced them into

the waters just north of the reservoir in 2001. Their predatory nature and tendency to feed at night in the winter has since wreaked havoc on the smallmouth bass and kokanee salmon fisheries, says Mosley. It is such a problem, in fact, that both Utah and Wyoming's fish and wildlife agencies require anglers to kill any burbot they catch in the Green River drainage. The result: opportunities to reel in an endless number of big, heavy fish with delicate white meat.

Mosley remembers catching 136 burbot in one night with a guide a few years ago.

"I had to sit down and say, 'Wow, this is surreal,'" he says. "I was trying to think of a time I had caught that many fish in that short a time. I found myself comparing it to the bluegills of my childhood."

"They're a way fun fish to catch," says Mike Asay, a Manila, Utah, angler.

Mike and his brother Robert live near the shores of Flaming Gorge and have won thousands of dollars in recent burbot fishing tournaments. Robert didn't want to give away all his hard-earned tricks—every fisherman keeps a little something close to the vest—but the brothers, Runquist, and Mosley did offer five basic tips, as well as a few secrets to help an eager angler catch burbot in any waters where they thrive:

1. Move around. If you haven't caught a fish in 30 minutes, go somewhere else. "Sometimes you'll catch four or five of them, and then they'll be gone," says Robert Asay. "You have to move until you find them again." Mosley tends to drill about 20 holes in different areas before he starts fishing to avoid creating a disturbance throughout the night.

2. Use a glow-in-the-dark jig. Burbot seem attracted to glow-in-the-dark lures. Robert figures they notice the light and then come closer when they smell the bait. Any glow-in-the-dark jig should work, but be sure to recharge it every 5 to 10 minutes with a flashlight. Slip a piece of cutbait onto the hook for a near-guaranteed burbot slayer.

3. Find rocky cliffs. "They say the fish sleep in the rocks in the daytime and come out at night in waves," says Mike Asay. Burbot may cruise the depths of the lake, but an angler's best shot is to fish along cliffs or rocky shorelines at depths of between 10 and 50 feet.

4. Stay close to the bottom. Set your bait about 2 inches from the lake bottom and jiggle it occasionally. "Unlike catfish, which are prone to go along the bottom, burbot seem to like it off the bottom just a little bit," Mosley says. "Use jigging spoons or Rapalas that put off a vibration or movement to attract fish."

5. Don't give up. Even if it's slow at 9 p.m., things could very well pick up by 2 a.m. "We get set up at 5 in the afternoon and the sun goes down at 6 p.m. We don't quit until 7 in the morning," Robert says.

THE UGLIEST CATCH

BURBOT MAY NOT BE MUCH TO LOOK AT, BUT JUST WAIT TILL YOU TASTE ONE
BY CHRISTINE PETERSON

Even the most die-hard outdoorsmen rarely list midnight in the dead of winter as the best time to sit on a frozen sheet of ice. It's dark, cold, and often windy. But maybe those who discount it haven't dunked glowing jigs into frigid waters and felt the slam of a bite from a slimy monster known as a burbot.

"You can go out and catch a lot of fish at a time when you're not really taking advantage of anything else," says Ryan Mosley, an avid icefisherman and Flaming Gorge project leader for Utah Division of Wildlife Resources.

Plus, they're big, they taste good, and they fight, says Rick Runquist, a 40-year veteran fishing guide out of Walker, Minnesota.

Burbot—also called eelpout, freshwater ling, lawyers, and poor-man's lobster—are native to much of the northern hemisphere, where their population varies from healthy to extinct.

In places like Minnesota's Leech Lake, Runquist still catches plenty but believes numbers may be down a little, as the fish has become more popular. The state's International Eelpout Festival, for example, draws more than 10,000 anglers in the middle of February each year.

"Everybody used to treat them like trash fish. They'd just be laying out on the ice," he says. "Ever since the Eelpout Festival got going up here, though, it's really changed people's attitude on how good eelpout really are."

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PHANTOM OF THE CRAPPIES

FOR LIGHTS-OUT CRAPPIE ACTION THIS WINTER, TRY DROPPING A CHANDELIER RIG **BY JAMES BRANDT**

Have you ever seen *The Phantom of the Opera*? (I know what you're thinking: This is a crappie story—what the hell does a Broadway play have to do with catching panfish? And I also know there are a couple of you thinking that you could see the connection if the name of the fish were spelled "crappy." Bear with me.) In the musical, there is a scene in which a giant chandelier comes crashing down on a ballroom full of people, creating the most epic scene of the show. Jerry Thompson (Itddguideservice.com), a veteran guide on Toledo Bend Reservoir, may well have had that in mind when he modified a traditional freshwater umbrella rig to drop a school of live minnows on the heads of unsuspecting crappies for the most unbelievable of December bites.

"There is a mile-long stretch mid-lake on the Texas side that the locals call the chicken coop—there was once a chicken farm on top of the hill adjacent to this area," says Thompson, who has earned the moniker Phantom of the Bend. "It is more than 50 feet deep, and straight across the lake is a huge spawning flat. So in the winter, when water temps get below 55 degrees, enormous schools of crappies stack up in 25- to 50-foot depths and offer nonstop action—if you can get them to bite."

Sure, you can drop down traditional crappie rigs with a weight and

one minnow and catch a fish or two. However, Thompson's chandelier rig offers several key benefits.

"First off, make sure that you're using an umbrella rig with a lead head and the thinnest wire you can find. Just add No. 2 Aberdeen hooks to the outside arms with the smallest minnows available and a small jig to the middle arm, and you are ready to fish. The reason to use this rig is not to catch five crappies at a time, but instead to excite a school to start eating," Thompson explains.

GET SCHOOLED

Thompson guides an average of 200 days a year for crappies, and as of this past September, he and his fellow guides have cleaned more than 39,000 fish this calendar year. Yes, he knows a thing or two about the behavior of these panfish.

He prefers to guide six people at a time over two, because when six minnows are in the water, a wad of crappies is much more likely to get active. And once a fish bites, the remaining fish in the

school often follow suit.

"The only real trick is finding schools of fish, which really isn't that hard if you have good electronics. I'll zigzag the steep bank from no shallower than 25 feet out up to 50 feet. Once you see the fish, all that's left to do is feed them," Thompson says.

"Our best day at the chicken coop was 286 crappies. We started at 9:00 a.m. and were done by 11:00 a.m."

Epic, indeed.

Jerry Thompson's specialized umbrella rig is a cold-weather crappie killer.

GUIDE TRICKS

Jerry Thompson has been guiding for crappies for the past 14 years. In that time, he's picked up a few tricks and isn't shy about sharing. Here are two biggies:

- "Use the smallest minnows you can find. Some people say big bait equals big fish, but sometimes big fish aren't hungry. That said, even after I eat a big Thanksgiving dinner, I'll pop an almond in my mouth if one is handy. Give fish the almonds!"
- "The rage in fishing rods is to get the most sensitive one on the market. I advise against this if you're going to fish live bait for crappies. If you can feel a fish breathing on your minnow, you'll set the hook too early. The Irod Crappie Elite LTD has the perfect amount of feel, and it's also perfectly parabolic for keeping these paper-mouthed fish hooked with light line."

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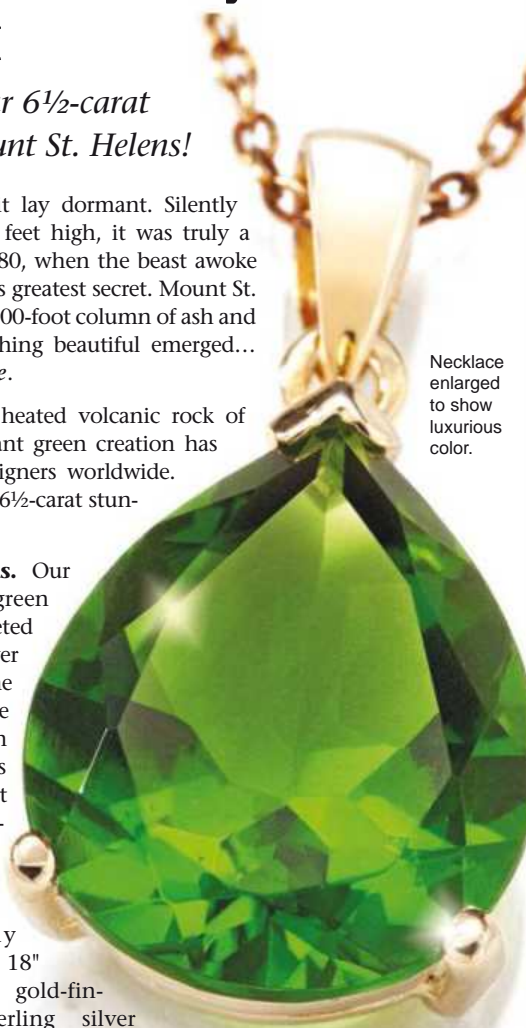
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